







## CRITICAL MISCELLANIES





CRITICAL  
MISCELLANIES

BY

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## VAUVENARGUES.

ONE of the most important phases of French thought in the great century of its illumination is only thoroughly intelligible, on condition that in studying it we keep constantly in mind the eloquence, force, and genius of Pascal. He was the greatest and most influential representative of that way of viewing human nature and its circumstances, which it was one of the characteristic glories of the eighteenth century to have rebelled against and rejected. More than a hundred years after the publication of the *Pensées*, Condorcet thought it worth while to prepare a new edition of them, with annotations, protesting, not without a certain unwonted deference of tone, against Pascal's doctrine of the base and desperate estate of man. Voltaire also had them reprinted with notes of his own, written in the same spirit of vivacious deprecation, which we may be sure would have been even more vivacious, if Voltaire had not remembered that he was speaking of the mightiest of all the enemies of the Jesuits. Apart from formal and specific dissents like these, all the writers who had drunk most deeply of the spirit of the eighteenth

century, lived in a constant ferment of revolt against the clear-witted and vigorous thinker of the century before, who had clothed mere theological mysteries with the force and importance of strongly entrenched propositions in a consistent philosophy.

The resplendent fervour of Bossuet's declamations upon the nothingness of kings, the pitifulness of mortal aims, the crushing ever-ready grip of the hand of God upon the purpose and faculty of man, rather filled the mind with exaltation than really depressed or humiliated it. From Bossuet to Pascal is to pass from the solemn splendour of the church to the chill of the crypt. Besides, Bossuet's attitude was professional, in the first place, and it was purely theological, in the second; so the main stream of thought flowed away and aside from him. To Pascal it was felt necessary that there should be reply and vindication, whether in the shape of deliberate and published formulas, or in the reasoned convictions of the individual intelligence working privately. A syllabus of the radical articles of the French creed of the eighteenth century would consist largely of the contradictions of the main propositions of Pascal. The old theological idea of the fall was hard to endure, but the idea of the fall was clenched by such general laws of human nature as this,—that 'men are so necessarily mad, that it would be to be mad by a new form of madness not to be mad;'—that man is nothing but masquerading, lying, and hypocrisy, both in what concerns himself and in respect of

others, wishing not to have the truth told to himself, and shrinking from telling it to anybody else ;<sup>1</sup> that the will, the imagination, the disorders of the body, the thousand concealed infirmities of the intelligence, conspire to reduce our discovery of justice and truth to a process of haphazard, in which we more often miss the mark than hit.<sup>2</sup> Pleasure, ambition, industry, are only means of distracting men from the otherwise unavoidable contemplation of their own misery. How speak of the dignity of the race and its history, when we know that a grain of sand in Cromwell's bladder altered the destinies of a kingdom, and that if Cleopatra's nose had been shorter the whole surface of the earth would be different? Imagine, in a word, 'a number of men in chains, and all condemned to death; some of them each day butchered in the sight of the others, while those who remain watch their own condition in that of their fellows, and eyeing one another in anguish and hopelessness, wait their turn; such is the situation of man.'<sup>3</sup>

It was hardly possible to push the tragical side of the verities of life beyond this, and there was soon an instinctive reaction towards realities. The sensations with their conditions of pleasure no less than of pain; the intelligence with its energetic aptitudes for the discovery of protective and fruitful knowledge; the affections with their large capacities for giving and receiving delight; the spontaneous inner impulse

<sup>1</sup> *Pensées*, i. v. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* i. vi. 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* i. vii. 6.

towards action and endurance in the face of outward circumstances—all these things reassured men, and restored in theory to them with ample interest what in practice they had never lost—a rational faith and exultation in their own faculties, both of finding out truth and of feeling a very substantial degree of happiness. On this side too, as on the other, speculation went to its extreme limit. The hapless and despairing wretches of Pascal were transformed by the votaries of perfectibility into bright beings not any lower than the angels. Between the two extremes there was one fine moralist who knew how to hold a just balance, perceiving that language is the expression of relations and proportions, that when we speak of virtue and genius we mean qualities that compared with those of mediocre souls deserve these high names, that greatness and happiness are comparative terms, and that there is nothing to be said of the estate of man except relatively. This moralist was Vauvenargues.

Vauvenargues was born of a good Provençal stock at Aix, in the year 1715. He had scarcely any of that kind of education which is usually performed in school-classes, and he was never able to read either Latin or Greek. Such slight knowledge as he ever got of the famous writers among the ancients was in translations. Of English literature, though its influence and that of our institutions were then becoming paramount in France, and though he had a particular esteem for the English character, he knew only the

writings of Locke and Pope, and the *Paradise Lost*.<sup>1</sup> Vauvenargues must be added to the list of thinkers and writers whose personal history shows, what men of letters sometimes appear to be in a conspiracy to make us forget, that for sober, healthy, and robust judgment on human nature and life, active and sympathetic contact with men in the transaction of the many affairs of their daily life is a better preparation than any amount of wholly meditative seclusion. He is also one of the many who show that a weakly constitution of body is not incompatible with fine and energetic qualities of mind, even if it be not actually friendly to them. Nor was feeble health any disqualification for the profession of arms. As Arms and the Church were the only alternatives for persons of noble birth, Vauvenargues, choosing the former, became a subaltern in the King's Own Regiment at the age of twenty (1735). Here in time he saw active service; for in 1740 the death of Charles VI. threw all Europe into confusion, and the French Government, falling in with the prodigious designs of the Marshal Belle-Isle and his brother, took sides against Maria Theresa, and supported the claims of the unhappy Elector of Bavaria who afterwards became the Emperor Charles VII. The disasters which fell upon France in consequence are well known. The forces despatched to Bavaria and Bohemia, after the brief triumph of the capture of

<sup>1</sup> M. Gilbert's edition of the *Works and Correspondence of Vauvenargues* (2 vols. Paris: Furne, 1857), II. 133.

Prague, were gradually overwhelmed without a single great battle, and it was considered a signal piece of good fortune when in the winter of 1742-43 Belle-Isle succeeded, with a loss of half his force, in leading by a long circuit, in the view of the enemy, and amid the horrors of famine and intense frost, some thirteen thousand men away from Prague. The King's Regiment took part in the Bohemian campaign, and in this frightful march which closed it; Vauvenargues with the rest.

To physical sufferings during two winters was added the distress of losing a comrade to whom he was deeply attached; he perished in the spring of '42 under the hardships of the war. The *Éloge* in which Vauvenargues commemorates the virtues and the pitiful fate of his friend, is too deeply marked with the florid and declamatory style of youth to be pleasing to a more ripened taste.<sup>1</sup> He complained that nobody who had read it observed that it was touching, not remembering that even the most tender feeling fails to touch us, when it has found stilted and turgid expression. Delicacy and warmth of affection were prominent characteristics in Vauvenargues. Perhaps if his life had been passed in less severe circumstances, this fine susceptibility might have become fanciful and morbid. As it was, he loved his friends with a certain patient sweetness and equanimity, in which there was never the faintest tinge of fretfulness, caprice, exacting vanity, or any

<sup>1</sup> *Éloge de P. H. de Seytres. Œuv. i. 141-150.*

of those other vices which betray in men that excessive consciousness of their own personality, which lies at the root of most of the obstacles in the way of an even and humane life. His nature had such depth and quality that the perpetual untowardness of circumstances left no evil print upon him; hardship made him not sour, but patient and wise, and there is no surer sign of noble temper.

The sufferings and bereavements of war were not his only trials. Vauvenargues was beset throughout the whole of his short life with the sordid and humiliating embarrassments of narrow means. His letters to Saint-Vincens, the most intimate of his friends, disclose the straits to which he was driven. The nature of these straits is an old story all over the world, and Vauvenargues did the same things that young men in want of money have generally done. It cannot be said, I fear, that he passed along those miry ways without some defilement. He bethinks him on one occasion that a rich neighbour has daughters. 'Why should I not undertake to marry one of them within two years, with a reasonable dowry, if he would lend me the money I want and provided I should not have repaid it by the time fixed?'<sup>1</sup> We must make allowance for the youth of the writer, and for a different view of marriage and its significance from our own. Even then there remains something to regret. Poverty, wrote Vauvenargues, in a maxim smacking unwontedly of

<sup>1</sup> *Ætæ.* ii. 233. See too p. 267.



commonplace, cannot debase strong souls, any more than riches can elevate low souls.<sup>1</sup> That depends. If poverty means pinching and fretting need of money, it may not debase the soul in any vital sense, but it is extremely likely to wear away a very priceless kind of delicacy in a man's estimate of human relations and their import.

Vauvenargues has told us what he found the life of the camp. Luxurious and indolent living, neglected duties, discontented sighing after the delights of Paris, the exaltation of rank and mediocrity, an insolent contempt for merit; these were the characteristics of the men in high military place. The lower officers meantime were overwhelmed by an expenditure that the luxury of their superiors introduced and encouraged; and they were speedily driven to retire by the disorder of their affairs, or by the impossibility of promotion, because men of spirit could not long endure the sight of flagrant injustice, and because those who labour for fame cannot tie themselves to a condition where there is nothing to be gathered but shame and humiliation.<sup>2</sup>

To these considerations of an extravagant expenditure and the absence of every chance of promotion, there was added in the case of Vauvenargues the still more powerful drawback of irretrievably broken health. The winter-march from Prague to Egra had sown fatal seed. His legs had been frost-bitten, and before they could be cured he was stricken by

<sup>1</sup> No. 579, i. 455.

<sup>2</sup> *Réflexions sur Divers Sujets*, i. 104.

small-pox, which left him disfigured and almost blind. So after a service of nine years, he quitted military life (1744). He vainly solicited employment as a diplomatist. The career was not yet open to the talents, and in the memorial which Vauvenargues drew up he dwelt less on his conduct than on his birth, being careful to show that he had an authentic ancestor who was Governor of Hyères in the early part of the fourteenth century.<sup>1</sup> But the only road to employment lay through the Court. The claims even of birth counted for nothing, unless they were backed by favour among the ignoble creatures who haunted Versailles. For success it was essential to be not only high-born, but a parasite as well. 'Permit me to assure you, sir,' Vauvenargues wrote courageously to Amelot, then the minister, 'that it is this moral impossibility for a gentleman, with only zeal to commend him, of ever reaching the King his master, which causes the discouragement that is observed among the nobility of the provinces, and which extinguishes all ambition.'<sup>2</sup> Amelot, to oblige Voltaire, eager as usual in good offices for his friend, answered the letters which Vauvenargues wrote, and promised to lay his name before the King as soon as a favourable opportunity should present itself.<sup>3</sup>

Vauvenargues was probably enough of a man of the world to take fair words of this sort at their value, and he had enough of qualities that do not belong to the man of the world to enable him to

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* ii. 249.<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* ii. 265.<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* ii. 266

confront the disappointment with cheerful fortitude 'Misfortune itself,' he had once written, 'has its charms in great extremities; for this opposition of fortune raises a courageous mind, and makes it collect all the forces that before were unemployed: it is in indolence and littleness that virtue suffers, when a timid prudence prevents it from rising in flight and forces it to creep along in bonds.'<sup>1</sup> He was true to the counsel which he had thus given years before, and with the consciousness that death was rapidly approaching, and that all hope of advancement in the ordinary way was at an end, even if there were any chance of his life, he persevered in his project of going to Paris, there to earn the fame which he instinctively felt that he had it in him to achieve. Neither scantiness of means nor the vehement protests of friends and relations—always the worst foes to superior character on critical occasions—could detain him in the obscurity of Provence. In 1745 he took up his quarters in Paris in a humble house near the School of Medicine. Literature had not yet acquired that importance in France which it was so soon to obtain. The Encyclopædia was still uncompleted, and the momentous work which that famous design was to accomplish, of organising the philosophers and men of letters into an army with banners, was still unexecuted. Voltaire, indeed, had risen, if not to the full height of his reputation, yet high enough both to command the admiration of people of

<sup>1</sup> *Conseils à un Jeune Homme*, i. 124.

quality, and to be the recognised chief of the new school of literature and thought. Voltaire had been struck by a letter in which Vauvenargues, then unknown to him, had sent a criticism comparing Corneille disadvantageously with Racine. Coming from a young officer, the member of a profession which Voltaire frankly described as 'very noble, in truth, but slightly barbarous,' this criticism was peculiarly striking. A great many years afterwards Voltaire was surprised in the same way, to find that an officer could write such a book as the *Félicité Publique* of the Marquis de Chastellux. To Vauvenargues he replied with many compliments, and pointed out with a good deal of pains the injustice which the young critic had done to the great author of *Cinna*. 'It is the part of a man like you,' he said admirably, 'to have preferences, but no exclusions.'<sup>1</sup> The correspondence thus begun was kept up with ever-growing warmth and mutual respect. 'If you had been born a few years earlier,' Voltaire wrote to him, 'my works would be worth all the more for it; but at any rate, even at the close of my career, you confirm me in the path that you pursue.'<sup>2</sup>

The personal impression was as fascinating as that which had been conveyed by Vauvenargues' letters. Voltaire took every opportunity of visiting his unfortunate friend, then each day drawing nearer to the grave. Men of humbler stature were equally attracted. 'It was at this time,' says the light-hearted

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* ii. 252.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* ii. 272.

Marmontel, 'that I first saw at home the man who had a charm for me beyond all the rest of the world, the good, the virtuous, the wise Vauvenargues. Cruelly used by nature in his body, he was in soul one of her rarest masterpieces. I seemed to see in him Fénelon weak and suffering. I could make a good book of his conversations, if I had had a chance of collecting them. You see some traces of it in the selection that he has left of his thoughts and meditations. But all eloquent and full of feeling as he is in his writings, he was even more so still in his conversation.'<sup>1</sup> Marmontel felt sincere grief when Vauvenargues died, and in the *Epistle to Voltaire* expressed his sorrow in some fair lines. They contain the happy phrase applied to Vauvenargues, '*ce cœur stoïque et tendre.*'<sup>2</sup>

In religious sentiment Vauvenargues was out of the groove of his time. That is to say, he was not unsusceptible of religion. Accepting no dogma, so far as we can judge, and complying with no observances, very faint and doubtful as to even the fundamentals—God, immortality, and the like—he never partook of the furious and bitter antipathy of the best men of that century against the church, its creeds, and its book. At one time, as will be seen from a passage which will be quoted by and by, his

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires de Marmontel*, vol. i. 189.

<sup>2</sup> The reader of Marmontel's *Mémoires* will remember the extraordinary and grotesque circumstances under which a younger brother of Mirabeau (of *l'amî des hommes*, that is) appealed to the memory of Vauvenargues. See vol. i. 256-260.

leanings were towards that vague and indefinable doctrine which identifies God with all the forces and their manifestations in the universe. Afterwards even this adumbration of a theistic explanation of the world seems to have passed from him, and he lived, as many other not bad men have lived, with that fair working substitute for a religious doctrine which is provided in the tranquil search, or the acceptance in a devotional spirit, of all larger mortal experiences and higher human impressions. There is a *Meditation on the Faith*, including a *Prayer*, among his writings; and there can be little doubt, in spite of Condorcet's incredible account of the circumstances of its composition, that it is the expression of what was at the time a sincere feeling.<sup>1</sup> It is, however, rather the straining and ecstatic rhapsody of one who ardently seeks faith, than the calm and devout assurance of him who already possesses it. Vauvenargues was religious by temperament, but he could not entirely resist the intellectual influences of the period. The one fact delivered him from dogma and superstition, and the other from scoffing and harsh unspirituality. He saw that apart from the question of the truth or falsehood of its historic basis, there was a balance to be struck between the consolations and the afflictions of the faith.<sup>2</sup> Practically he was content to leave this balance unstruck, and to pass by on the other side. Scarcely any of his maxims concern religion. One of these few is worth quoting, where he says: 'The

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* i. 225-232.

<sup>2</sup> *Letter to Saint-Vincens*, ii. 146.

strength or weakness of our belief depends more on our courage than our light; not all those who mock at auguries have more intellect than those who believe in them.<sup>1</sup>

The end came in the spring of 1747, when Vauvenargues was no more than thirty-two. Perhaps, in spite of his physical miseries, these two years in Paris were the least unhappy time in his life. He was in the great centre where the fame which he longed for was earned and liberally awarded. A year of intercourse with so full and alert and brilliant a mind as Voltaire's, must have been more to one so appreciative of mental greatness as Vauvenargues, than many years of intercourse with subalterns in the Regiment of the King. With death, now known to be very near at hand, he had made his account before. 'To execute great things,' he had written in a maxim which gained the lively praise of Voltaire, 'a man must live as though he had never to die.'<sup>2</sup> This mood was common among the Greeks and Romans; but the religion which Europe accepted in the time of its deepest corruption and depravation, retained the mark of its dismal origin nowhere so strongly as in the distorted prominence which it gave in the minds

<sup>1</sup> No. 318.

<sup>2</sup> Napoleon said on some occasion, '*Il faut vouloir vivre et savoir mourir.*' M. Littré prefaces the third volume of that heroic monument of learning and industry, his *Dictionary of the French Language*, by the words: 'He who wishes to employ his life seriously ought always to act as if he had long to live, and to govern himself as if he would have soon to die.'

of its votaries to the dissolution of the body. It was one of the first conditions of the Revival of Reason that the dreary *memento mori* and its hateful emblems should be deliberately effaced. 'The thought of death,' said Vauvenargues, 'leads us astray, because it makes us forget to live.' He did not understand living in the sense which the dissolute attach to it. The libertinism of his regiment called no severe rebuke from him, but his meditative temper drew him away from it even in his youth. It is not impossible that if his days had not been cut short, he might have impressed Parisian society with ideas and a sentiment, that would have left to it all its cheerfulness, and yet prevented that laxity which so fatally weakened it. Turgot, the only other conspicuous man who could have withstood the license of the time, had probably too much of that austerity which is in the fibre of so many great characters, to make any moral counsels that he might have given widely effective.

Vauvenargues was sufficiently free from all taint of the pedagogue or the preacher to have dispelled the sophisms of licence, less by argument than by the gracious attraction of virtue in his own character. The stock moralist, like the commonplace orator of the pulpit, fails to touch the hearts of men or to affect their lives, for lack of delicacy, of sympathy, and of freshness; he attempts to compensate for this by excess of emphasis, and that more often disgusts us than persuades. Vauvenargues, on the other



hand, is remarkable for delicacy and half-reserved tenderness. Everything that he has said is coloured and warmed with feeling for the infirmities of men. He writes not merely as an analytical outsider. Hence, unlike most moralists, he is no satirist. He had borne the burdens. 'The looker-on,' runs one of his maxims, 'softly lying in a carpeted chamber, inveighs against the soldier, who passes winter nights on the river's edge, and keeps watch in silence over the safety of the land.'<sup>1</sup> Vauvenargues had been something very different from the safe and sheltered critic of other men's battles, and this is the secret of the hold which his words have upon us. They are real, with the reality that can only come from two sources; from high poetic imagination, which Vauvenargues did not possess, or else from experience of life acting on and strengthening a generous nature. 'The cause of most books of morality being so insipid,' he says, 'is that their authors are not sincere; is that, being feeble echoes of one another, they could not venture to publish their own real maxims and private sentiments.'<sup>2</sup> One of the secrets of his own freedom from this ordinary insipidity of moralists was his freedom also from their pretentiousness and insincerity.

Besides these positive merits, he had, as we have said, the negative distinction of never being emphatic. His sayings are nearly always moderate and persuasive, alike in sentiment and in phrase. Sometimes

<sup>1</sup> No. 223.

<sup>2</sup> No. 300.

they are almost tentative in the diffidence of their turn. Compared with him La Rochefoucauld's manner is hard, and that of La Bruyère sententious. In the moralist who aspires to move and win men by their best side instead of their worst, the absence of this hardness and the presence of a certain lambsy and play even in the exposition of truths of perfect assurance, are essential conditions of psychagogic quality. In religion such law does not hold, and the contagion of fanaticism is usually most rapidly spread by a rigorous and cheerless example.

We may notice in passing that Vauvenargues has the defects of his qualities, and that with his aversion to emphasis was bound up a certain inability to appreciate even grandeur and originality, if they were too strongly and boldly marked. 'It is easy to criticise an author,' he has said, 'but hard to estimate him.'<sup>1</sup> This was never more unfortunately proved than in the remarks of Vauvenargues himself upon the great Molière. There is almost a difficulty in forgiving a writer who can say that 'La Bruyère, animated with nearly the same genius, painted the crookedness of men with as much truth and as much force as Molière; but I believe that there is more eloquence and more elevation to be found in La Bruyère's images.'<sup>2</sup> Without at all undervaluing La Bruyère, one of the acutest and finest of writers, we may say that this is a truly disastrous piece of criticism. Quite as unhappy is the preference given to Racine over Molière, not merely

<sup>1</sup> No. 264.      <sup>2</sup> *Réflexions Critiques sur quelques Poètes*, I. 237.

for the conclusion arrived at, but for the reasons on which it is founded. Molière's subjects, we read, are low, his language negligent and incorrect, his characters bizarre and eccentric. Racine, on the other hand, takes sublime themes, presents us with noble types, and writes with simplicity and elegance. It is not enough to concede to Racine the glory of art, while giving to Molière or Corneille the glory of genius. 'When people speak of the art of Racine—the art which puts things in their place ; which characterises men, their passions, manners, genius ; which banishes obscurities, superfluities, false brilliancies ; which paints nature with fire, sublimity, and grace—what can we think of such art as this, except that it is the genius of extraordinary men, and the origin of those rules that writers without genius embrace with so much zeal and so little success ?' <sup>1</sup> And it is certainly true that the art of Racine implied genius. The defect of the criticism lies, as usual, in a failure to see that there is glory enough in both ; in the art of highly-finished composition and presentation, and in the art of bold and striking creation. Yet Vauvenargues was able to discern the secret of the popularity of Molière, and the foundation of the common opinion that no other dramatist had carried his own kind of art so far as Molière had carried his ; 'the reason is, I fancy, that he is more natural than any of the others, and this is an important lesson for everybody who wishes to write.' <sup>2</sup> He did not see how nearly

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* i. 248.    <sup>2</sup> *Réflexions Critiques sur quelques Poètes*, i. 238.

everything went in this concession, that Molière was, above all, natural. With equal truth of perception he condemned the affectation of grandeur lent by the French tragedians to classical personages who were in truth simple and natural, as the principal defect of the national drama, and the common rock on which their poets made shipwreck.<sup>1</sup> Let us, however, rejoice for the sake of the critical reputation of Vauvenargues that he was unable to read Shakespeare. One for whom Molière is too eccentric, grotesque, inelegant, was not likely to do much justice to the mightiest but most irregular of all dramatists.

A man's prepossessions in dramatic poetry, supposing him to be cultivated enough to have any prepossessions, furnish the most certain clue that we can get to the spirit in which he inwardly regards character and conduct. The uniform and reasoned preference which Vauvenargues had for Racine over Molière and Corneille, was only the transfer to art of that balanced, moderate, normal, and emphatically harmonious temper, which he brought to the survey of human nature. Excess was a condition of thought, feeling, and speech, that in every form was disagreeable to him; alike in the gloom of Pascal's reveries, and in the inflation of speech of some of the heroes of Corneille. He failed to relish even Montaigne as he ought to have done, because Montaigne's method was too prolix, his scepticism too universal, his egoism

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* i. 243.

too manifest, and because he did not produce complete and artistic wholes.<sup>1</sup>

Reasonableness is the strongest mark in Vauvenargues' thinking ; balance, evenness, purity of vision, penetration finely toned with indulgence. He is never betrayed into criticism of men from the point of view of immutable first principles. Perhaps this was what the elder Mirabeau meant when he wrote to Vauvenargues, who was his cousin : ' You have the English genius to perfection,' and what Vauvenargues meant when he wrote of himself to Mirabeau : ' Nobody in the world has a mind less French than I.'<sup>2</sup> These international comparisons are among the least fruitful of literary amusements, even when they happen not to be extremely misleading ; as when, for example, Voltaire called Locke the English Pascal, a description which can only be true on condition that the qualifying adjective is meant to strip either Locke or Pascal of most of his characteristic traits. And if we compare Vauvenargues with any of our English aphoristic writers, there is not resemblance enough to make the contrast instructive. The obvious truth is that in this department our literature is particularly weak, while French literature is particularly strong in it. With the exception of Bacon, we have no writer of apophthegms of the first order ; and the difference between Bacon as a moralist and Pascal or Vauvenargues, is the difference between Polonius's famous discourse to Laertes and the soliloquy of Hamlet.

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* i. 275.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondance.* *Œuv.* ii. 131, 207.

Bacon's precepts refer rather to external conduct and worldly fortune than to the inner composition of character, or to the 'wide, gray, lampless' depths of human destiny. We find the same national characteristic, though on an infinitely lower level, in Franklin's oracular saws. Among the French sages a psychological element is predominant, as well as an occasional transcendent loftiness of feeling, not to be found in Bacon's wisest maxims, and from his point of view in their composition we could not expect to find them there. We seek in vain amid the positivity of Bacon, or the quaint and timorous paradox of Browne, or the acute sobriety of Shaftesbury, for any of that poetic pensiveness which is strong in Vauvenargues, and reaches tragic heights in Pascal.<sup>1</sup> Addison may have the delicacy of Vauvenargues, but it is a delicacy that wants the stir and warmth of feeling. It seems as if with English writers poetic sentiment naturally sought expression in poetic forms, while the French men of nearly corresponding temperament were restrained within the limits of prose by reason of the vigorously prescribed stateliness and stiffness of their verse at that time. A man in this country with the quality of Vauvenargues, with his delicacy, tenderness, elevation, would have composed lyrics. We

<sup>1</sup> Long-winded and tortuous and difficult to seize as Shaftesbury is as a whole, in detached sentences he shows marked aphoristic quality; e.g. 'The most ingenious way of becoming foolish is by a system;' 'The liker anything is to wisdom, if it be not plainly the thing itself, the more directly it becomes its opposite.'

have undoubtedly lost much by the laxity and irregularity of our verse, but as undoubtedly we owe to its freedom some of the most perfect and delightful of the minor figures that adorn the noble gallery of English poets.

It would be an error to explain the superiority of the great French moralists by supposing in them a fancy and imagination too defective for poetic art. It was the circumstances of the national literature during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which made Vauvenargues for instance a composer of aphorisms, rather than a moral poet like Pope. Let us remember some of his own most discriminating words. 'Who has more imagination,' he asks, 'than Bossuet, Montaigne, Descartes, Pascal, all of them great philosophers? Who more judgment and wisdom than Racine, Boileau, La Fontaine, Molière, all of them poets full of genius? *It is not true, then, that the ruling qualities exclude the others; on the contrary, they suppose them.* I should be much surprised if a great poet were without vivid lights on philosophy, at any rate moral philosophy, and it will very seldom happen for a true philosopher to be totally devoid of imagination.'<sup>1</sup> With imagination in the highest sense Vauvenargues was not largely endowed, but he had as much as is essential to reveal to one that the hard and sober-judging faculty is not the single, nor even the main element, in a wise and full intelligence. 'All my philosophy,' he wrote to Mirabeau, when only four or five and twenty years

<sup>1</sup> No. 278 (i. 411).

old, an age when the intellect is usually most exigent of supremacy, 'all my philosophy has its source in my heart.'<sup>1</sup>

In the same spirit he had well said that there is more cleverness in the world than greatness of soul, more people with talent than with lofty character.<sup>2</sup> Hence some of the most peculiarly characteristic and impressive of his aphorisms; that famous one, for instance, '*Great thoughts come from the heart,*' and the rest which hang upon the same idea. 'Virtuous instinct has no need of reason, but supplies it.' 'Reason misleads us more often than nature.' 'Reason does not know the interests of the heart.' 'Perhaps we owe to the passions the greatest advantages of the intellect.' Such sayings are only true on condition that instinct and nature and passion have been already moulded under the influence of reason; just as this other saying, which won the warm admiration of Voltaire, '*Magnanimity owes no account of its motives to prudence,*' is only true on condition that by magnanimity we understand a mood not out of accord with the loftiest kind of prudence.<sup>3</sup> But in the eighteenth century reason and prudence were words current in

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* ii. 115.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* i. 87.

<sup>3</sup> Doch

Zuweilen ist des Sinns in einer Sache  
Auch mehr, als wir vermuthen; und es wäre  
So unerhört doch nicht, dass uns der Heiland  
Auf Wegen zu sich zöge, die der Kluge  
Von selbst nicht leicht betreten würde.

*Nathan der Weise*, iii. 10.



their lower and narrower sense, and thus one coming like Vauvenargues to see this lowness and narrowness, sought to invest ideas and terms that in fact only involved modifications of these, with a significance of direct antagonism. Magnanimity was contrasted inimically with prudence, and instinct and nature were made to thrust from their throne reason and reflection. Carried to its limit, this tendency developed the speculative and social excesses of the great sentimental school. In Vauvenargues it was only the moderate, just, and most seasonable protest of a fine observer, against the supremacy among ideals of a narrow, deliberative, and calculating spirit.

His exaltation of virtuous instinct over reason is in a curious way parallel to Burke's memorable exaltation over reason of prejudice. 'Prejudice,' said Burke, 'previously engages the mind in a steady course of wisdom and virtue, and does not leave the man hesitating in the moment of decision, sceptical, puzzled, and unresolved. Prejudice renders a man's virtue his habit, and not a series of unconnected acts; through just prejudice his duty becomes a part of his nature.'<sup>1</sup> What Burke designated as prejudice, Vauvenargues less philosophically styled virtuous instinct; each meant precisely the same thing, though the difference of phrase implied a different view of its origin and growth: and the side opposite to each of them was the same—namely, a sophisticated and over-refining intelligence, narrowed to the considera-

<sup>1</sup> *Reflections on the French Revolution*, Works (ed. 1842), i. 414.

tion of particular circumstances as they presented themselves.

Translated into the modern equivalent, the heart, nature, instinct of Vauvenargues all mean *character*. He insisted upon spontaneous impulse as a condition of all greatest thought and action. Men think and work on the highest level when they move without conscious and deliberate strain after virtue : when, in other words, their habitual motives, aims, methods, their character, in short, naturally draw them into the region of what is virtuous. '*It is by our ideas that we ennoble our passions or we debase them ; they rise high or sink low according to the man's soul.*'<sup>1</sup> All this has ceased to be new to our generation, but a hundred and thirty years ago, and indeed much nearer to us than that, the key to all nobleness was thought to be found only by cool balancing and prudential calculation. A book like *Clarissa Harlowe* shows us this prudential and calculating temper underneath a varnish of sentimentalism and fine feelings, an incongruous and extremely displeasing combination, particularly characteristic of certain sets and circles in that century. One of the distinctions of Vauvenargues is that exaltation of sentiment did not with him cloak a substantial adherence to a low prudence, nor to that fragment of reason which has so constantly usurped the name and place of the whole. He eschewed the too common compromise which the sentimentalist makes with reflection and calculation,

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* ii. 170.

and it was this which saved him from being a sentimentalist.

That doctrine of the predominance of the heart over the head, which has brought forth so many pernicious and destructive fantasies in the history of social thought, represented in his case no more than a reaction against the great detractors of humanity. Rochefoucauld had surveyed mankind exclusively from the point of their vain and egoistic propensities, and his aphorisms are profoundly true of all persons in whom these propensities are habitually supreme, and of all the world in so far as these propensities happen to influence them. Pascal, on the one hand, leaving the affections and inclinations of a man very much on one side, had directed all his efforts to showing the pitiful feebleness and incurable helplessness of man in the sphere of the understanding. Vauvenargues is thus confronted by two sinister pictures of humanity—the one of its moral meanness and littleness, the other of its intellectual poverty and impotency. He turned away from both of them, and found in magnanimous and unsophisticated feeling, of which he was conscious in himself and observant in others, a compensation alike for the selfishness of some men and the intellectual limitations of all men. This compensation was ample enough to restore the human self-respect that Pascal and Rochefoucauld had done their best to weaken.

The truth in that disparagement was indisputable so far as it went. It was not a kind of truth, how-

ever, on which it is good for the world much to dwell, and it is the thinkers like Vauvenargues who build up and inspire high resolve. 'Scarcely any maxim,' runs one of his own, 'is true in all respects.'<sup>1</sup> We must take them in pairs to find out the mean truth; and to understand the ways of men, so far as words about men can help us, we must read with appreciation not only Vauvenargues, who said that great thoughts come from the heart, but La Rochefoucauld, who called the intelligence the dupe of the heart, and Pascal, who saw only desperate creatures, miserably perishing before one another's eyes in the grim dungeon of the universe. Yet it is the observer in the spirit of Vauvenargues, of whom we must always say that he has chosen the better part. Vauvenargues' own estimate was sound. 'The Duke of La Rochefoucauld seized to perfection the weak side of human nature; maybe he knew its strength too; and only contested the merit of so many splendid actions in order to unmask false wisdom. Whatever his design, the effect seems to me mischievous; his book, filled with delicate invective against hypocrisy, even to this day turns men away from virtue, by persuading them that it is never genuine.'<sup>2</sup> Or, as he put it elsewhere, without express personal reference: 'You must arouse in men the feeling of their prudence and strength, if you would raise their character; those who only apply themselves to bring out the absurdities and weaknesses of mankind, enlighten the judgment of the public far

<sup>1</sup> No. 111.<sup>2</sup> *Œuv.* ii. 74.

less than they deprave its inclination.’<sup>1</sup> This principle was implied in Goethe’s excellent saying, that if you would improve a man, it is best to begin by persuading him that he is already that which you would have him to be.

To talk in this way was to bring men out from the pits which cynicism on the one side, and asceticism on the other, had dug so deep for them, back to the warm precincts of the cheerful day. The cynic and the ascetic had each looked at life through a microscope, exaggerating blemishes, distorting proportions, filling the eye with ugly and disgusting illusions.<sup>2</sup> Humanity, as was said, was in disgrace with the thinkers. The maxims of Vauvenargues were a plea for a return to a healthy and normal sense of relations. ‘These philosophers,’ he cried, ‘are men, yet they do not speak in human language; they change all the ideas of things, and misuse all their terms.’<sup>3</sup> These are some of the most direct of his retorts upon Pascal and La Rochefoucauld:

‘I have always felt it to be absurd for philosophers to fabricate a Virtue that is incompatible with the nature of humanity, and then after having pretended

<sup>1</sup> No. 285.

<sup>2</sup> ‘A man may as well pretend to cure himself of love by viewing his mistress through the artificial medium of a microscope or prospect, and beholding there the coarseness of her skin and monstrous disproportion of her features, as hope to excite or moderate any passion by the artificial arguments of a Seneca or an Epictetus.’—Hume’s *Essays* (xviii. *The Sceptic*).

<sup>3</sup> *Œuv.* i. 163.

this, to declare coldly that there is no virtue. If they are speaking of the phantom of their imagination, they may of course abandon or destroy it as they please, for they invented it; but true virtue--which they cannot be brought to call by this name, because it is not in conformity with their definitions; which is the work of nature and not their own; and which consists mainly in goodness and vigour of soul--that does not depend on their fancies, and will last for ever with characters that cannot possibly be effaced.'

'The body has its graces, the intellect its talents, is the heart then to have nothing but vices? And must man, who is capable of reason, be incapable of virtue?'

'We are susceptible of friendship, justice, humanity, compassion, and reason. O my friends, what then is virtue?'

'Disgust is no mark of health, nor is appetite a disorder; quite the reverse. Thus we think of the body, but we judge the soul on other principles. We suppose that a strong soul is one that is exempt from passions, and as youth is more active and ardent than later age, we look on it as a time of fever, and place the strength of man in his decay.'<sup>1</sup>

The theological speculator insists that virtue lies in a constant and fierce struggle between the will and the passions, between man and human nature.

<sup>1</sup> Noë. 296-298, 148.

Vauvenargues founded his whole theory of life on the doctrine that the will is not something independent of passions, inclinations, and ideas, but on the contrary is a mere index moved and fixed by them, as the hand of a clock follows the operation of the mechanical forces within. Character is an integral unit. 'Whether it is reason or passion that moves us, it is we who determine ourselves; it would be madness to distinguish one's thoughts and sentiments from one's self. . . . No will in men, which does not owe its direction to their temperament, their reasoning, and their actual feelings.'<sup>1</sup> Virtue, then, is not necessarily a condition of strife between the will and the rest of our faculties and passions; no such strife is possible, for the will obeys the preponderant passion or idea, or group of passions and ideas; and the contest lies between one passion or group and another. Hence, in right character there is no struggle at all, for the virtuous inclinations naturally and easily direct our will and actions; virtue is then independent of struggle; and the circumstance of our finding pleasure in this or that practice, is no reason why both the practice and the pleasure should not be unimpeachably virtuous.

It is easy to see the connection between this theory of the dependence of the will, and the prominence which Vauvenargues is ever giving to the passions. These are the key to the movements of the will. To direct and shape the latter, you must educate the

<sup>1</sup> *Sur le Libre Arbitre. Œuv. i. 199.*

former. It was for his perception of this truth, we may notice in passing, that Comte awarded to Vauvenargues a place in the Positivist Calendar; 'for his direct effort, in spite of the universal desuetude into which it had fallen, to reorganise the culture of the heart according to a better knowledge of human nature, of which this noble thinker discerned the centre to be affective.'<sup>1</sup>

This theory of the will, however, was not allowed to rest here; the activity of man was connected with the universal order. 'What prevents the mind from perceiving the motive of its actions, is only their infinite quickness. Our thoughts perish at the moment in which their effects make themselves known; when the action commences, the principle has vanished; the will appears, the feeling is gone; we cannot find it ourselves, and so doubt if we ever had it. But it would be an enormous defect to have a will without a principle; our actions would be all haphazard; the world would be nothing but caprice; all order would be overturned. It is not enough, then, to admit it to be true that it is reflection or sentiment that leads us: we must add further that it would be monstrous for this to be otherwise.'<sup>2</sup> . . .

'The will recalls or suspends our ideas; our ideas shape or vary the laws of the will; the laws of the will are thus dependent on the laws of creation; but the laws of creation are not foreign to ourselves, they constitute our being, and form our essence, and are entirely

<sup>1</sup> *Politique Positive*, iii. 589.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* i. 194.



our own, and we can say boldly that we act by ourselves, when we only act by them.<sup>1</sup> . . .

‘Let us recognise here, then, our profound subjection. . . . Let us rend the melancholy veil which hides from our eyes the eternal chain of the world and the glory of the Creator. . . . External objects form ideas in the mind, these ideas form sentiments, these sentiments volitions, these volitions actions in ourselves and outside of ourselves. So noble a dependence in all the parts of this vast universe must conduct our reflections to the unity of its principle; this subordination makes the true greatness of the beings subordinated. The excellence of man is in his dependence; his subjection displays two marvellous images—the infinite power of God, and the dignity of our own soul. . . . Man independent would be an object of contempt; the feeling of his own imperfection would be his eternal torture. But the same feeling, when we admit his dependence, is the foundation of his sweetest hope; it reveals to him the nothingness of finite good, and leads him back to his principle, which insists on joining itself to him, and which alone can satisfy his desires in the possession of himself.’<sup>2</sup>

Vauvenargues showed his genuine healthiness not more by a plenary rejection of the doctrine of the incurable vileness and frenzy of man, than by his freedom from the boisterous and stupid transcendental optimism which has too many votaries in our time. He would not have men told that they are miserable

<sup>1</sup> *Politique Positive*, 205.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* 206, 207.

earth-gnomes, the slaves of a black destiny, but he ill placed them a good deal lower than the angels. For instance: 'We are too inattentive or too much occupied with ourselves, to get to the bottom of one another's characters; *whoever has watched masks at a ball dancing together in a friendly manner, and joining hands without knowing who the others are, and then parting the moment afterwards never to meet again nor ever regret, or be regretted, can form some idea of the world.*'<sup>1</sup> It then, as he said elsewhere: 'We can be perfectly aware of our imperfection, without being humiliated by the sight. *One of the noblest qualities of our nature that we are able so easily to dispense with greater perfection.*'<sup>2</sup> In all this we mark the large and rational maneness of the new time, a tolerant and kindly and elevating estimate of men.

The faith in the natural and simple operation of virtue, without the aid of all sorts of valetudinarian strictions, comes out on every occasion. The appist theory of the conditions of virtue found no quarter with him. Mirabeau for instance complained the atmosphere of the Court, as fatal to the practice of virtue. Vauvenargues replied that the people there were doubtless no better than they should be, and that vice was dominant. 'So much the worse for those who have vices. But when you are fortunate enough to possess virtue, it is, to my thinking, a very noble ambition to lift up this same virtue in the midst of corruption, to make it succeed, to place it

<sup>1</sup> No. 330.

<sup>2</sup> Nos. 462, 463.

above all, to indulge and control the passions without reproach, to overthrow the obstacles to them, and to surrender yourself to the inclinations of an upright and magnanimous heart, instead of combating or concealing them in retreat, without either satisfying or vanquishing them. I know nothing so weak and so vain as to flee before vices, or to hate them without measure; for people only hate them by way of reprisal because they are afraid of them, or else out of vengeance because these vices have played them some sorry turn; but a little loftiness of soul, some knowledge of the heart, a gentle and tranquil humour, will protect you against the risk of being either surprised, or keenly wounded by them.<sup>1</sup>

There is a tolerably obvious distinction between two principal ways of examining character. One is a musing, subjective method of delineation, in which the various shades and windings seem to reveal themselves with a certain spontaneity, and we follow many recesses and depths in the heart of another, such as only music stirs into consciousness in ourselves. Besides this rarer poetic method, there is what may be styled the diplomatist's method; it classifies characters objectively, according to the kinds of outer conduct in which they manifest themselves, and according to the best ways of approaching and dealing with them. The second of these describes the spirit in which Vauvenargues observed men. He is French, and not German, and belongs to the eighteenth

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance. Œuv.* ii. 163.

century, and not to the seventeenth or the nineteenth. His *Characters*, very little known in this country, are as excellent as any work in this kind that we are acquainted with, or probably as excellent as such work can be. They are real and natural, yet while abstaining as rigorously as Vauvenargues everywhere does from grotesque and extravagant traits, they avoid equally the vice of presenting the mere bald and sterile flats of character, which he that runs may read. As we have said, he had the quality possessed by so few of those who write about men; he watched men, and drew from the life. In a word, he studied concrete examples and interrogated his own experience—the only sure guarantee that one writing on his themes has anything which it is worth our while to listen to. Among other consequences of this reality of their source is the agreeable fact that these pictures are free from that clever bitterness and easy sarcasm, by which crude and jejune observers, thinking more of their own wit than of what they observe, sometimes gain a little reputation. Even the coxcombs, self-laping knaves, simpletons, braggarts, and other evil or pitiful types whom he selects, are drawn with unstrained and simple conformity to reality. The pictures have no moral label pinned on to them. Yet Vauvenargues took life seriously enough, and it was just because he took it seriously, that he had no inclination to air his wit or practise a verbal humour upon the stuff out of which happiness and misery are made.

One or two fragments will suffice. Take the Man of the World, for instance :

‘A man of the world is not he who knows other men best, who has most foresight or dexterity in affairs, who is most instructed by experience and study ; he is neither a good manager, nor a man of science, nor a politician, nor a skilful officer, nor a painstaking magistrate. He is a man who is ignorant of nothing but who knows nothing ; who, doing his own business ill, fancies himself very capable of doing that of other people ; a man who has much useless wit, who has the art of saying flattering things which do not flatter, and judicious things which give no information ; who can persuade nobody, though he speaks well ; endowed with that sort of eloquence which can bring out trifles, and which annihilates great subjects ; as penetrating in what is ridiculous and external in men, as he is blind to the depths of their minds. One who, afraid of being wearisome by reason, is wearisome by his extravagances ; is jocose without gaiety, and lively without passion.’<sup>1</sup>

Or the two following, the Inconstant Man, and Lycas or the Firm Man :

‘Such a man seems really to possess more than one character. A powerful imagination makes his soul take the shape of all the objects that affect it ; he suddenly astonishes the world by acts of generosity and courage which were never expected of him ; the image of virtue inflames, elevates, softens, masters his

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* i. 310.

heart; he receives the impression from the loftiest, and he surpasses them. But when his imagination has grown cold, his courage droops, his generosity sinks; the vices opposed to these virtues take possession of his soul, and after having reigned awhile supreme, they make way for other objects. . . . We cannot say that they have a great nature, or strong, or weak, or light; it is a swift and imperious imagination which reigns with sovereign power over all their being, which subjugates their genius, and which prescribes for them in turn those fine actions and those faults, those heights and those littlenesses, those flights of enthusiasm and those fits of disgust, which we are wrong in charging either with hypocrisy or madness.<sup>1</sup>

‘Lycas unites with a self-reliant, bold, and impetuous nature, a spirit of reflection and profundity which moderates the counsels of his passions, which leads him by impenetrable motives, and makes him advance to his ends by many paths. He is one of those long-sighted men, who consider the succession of events from afar off, who always finish a design begun; who are capable, I do not say of dissembling either a misfortune or an offence, but of rising above either, instead of letting it depress them; deep natures, independent by their firmness in daring all and suffering all; who, whether they resist their inclinations out of foresight, or whether, out of pride and a secret consciousness of their resources, they defy what

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* i. 325.

is called prudence, always, in good as in evil, cheat the acutest conjectures.<sup>1</sup>

Let us note that Vauvenargues is almost entirely free from that favourite trick of the aphoristic person, which consists in forming a series of sentences, the predicates being various qualifications of extravagance, vanity, and folly, and the subject being Women. He resists this besetting temptation of the modern speaker of apophthegms to identify woman and fool. On the one or two occasions in which he begins the maxim with the fatal words, *Les femmes*, he is as little profound as other people who persist in thinking of man and woman as two different species. 'Women,' for example, 'have ordinarily more vanity than temperament, and more temperament than virtue'—which is fairly true of all human beings, and in so far as it is true, describes men just as exactly—and no more so—as it describes women. In truth, Vauvenargues felt too seriously about conduct and character to go far in this direction. Now and again he is content with a mere smartness, as when he says: 'There are some thoroughly excellent people who cannot get rid of their *ennui* except at the expense of society.' But such a mood is not common. He is usually grave, and not seldom profoundly weighty, delicate without being weak, and subtle without obscurity; as for example:

'People teach children to fear and obey; the avarice, pride, or timidity of the fathers, instructs the

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* i. 326.

children in economy, arrogance, or submission. We stir them up to be yet more and more copyists, which they are only too disposed to be, as it is; nobody thinks of making them original, hardy, independent.'

'If instead of dulling the vivacity of children, people did their best to raise the impulsiveness and movement of their characters, what might we not expect from a fine natural temper?'

Again: 'The moderation of the weak is mediocrity.'

'What is arrogance in the weak is elevation in the strong; as the strength of a sick man is frenzy, and that of a whole man is vigour.'

'To speak imprudently and to speak boldly are nearly always the same thing. But we may speak without prudence, and still speak what is right; and it is a mistake to fancy that a man has a shallow intelligence, because the boldness of his character or the liveliness of his temper may have drawn from him, in spite of himself, some dangerous truth.'

'It is a great sign of mediocrity always to praise moderately.'

Vauvenargues has a saying to the effect that men very often, without thinking of it, form an idea of their face and expression from the ruling sentiment of which they are conscious in themselves at the time. He hints that this is perhaps the reason why a coxcomb always believes himself to be handsome.<sup>1</sup> And in a letter to Mirabeau, he describes pleasantly how

<sup>1</sup> No. 236.



sometimes in moments of distraction he pictures himself with an air of loftiness, of majesty, of penetration, according to the idea that is occupying his mind, and how if by chance he sees his face in the mirror, he is nearly as much amazed as if he saw a Cyclops or a Tartar.<sup>1</sup> Yet his nature, if we may trust the portrait, revealed itself in his face; it is one of the most delightful to look upon, even in the cold inarticulateness of an engraving, that the gallery of fair souls contains for us. We may read the beauty of his character in the soft strength of the brow, the meditative lines of mouth and chin, above all, the striking clearness, the self-collection, the feminine solicitude, that mingle freely and without eagerness or expectancy in his gaze, as though he were hearkening to some ever-flowing inward stream of divine melody. We think of that gracious touch in Bacon's picture of the father of Solomon's House, that 'he had an aspect as though he pitied men.' If we reproach France in the eighteenth century with its coarseness, artificiality, shallowness, because it produced such men as the rather brutish Duclos, we ought to remember that this was also the century of Vauvenargues, one of the most tender lofty, cheerful, and delicately sober of all moralists.

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* ii. 188.

## TURGOT.

### I.

ANNE-ROBERT-JACQUES TURGOT was born in Paris on the 10th of May 1727. He died in 1781. His life covered rather more than half a century, extending, if we may put it a little roughly, over the middle fifty years of the eighteenth century. This middle period marks the exact date of the decisive and immediate preparation for the Revolution. At its beginning neither the intellectual nor the social elements of the great disruption had distinctly appeared, or commenced their fermentation. At its close their work was completed, and we may count the months thence until the overthrow of every institution in France. It was between 1727 and 1781 that the true revolution took place. The events from '89 were only finishing strokes, the final explosion of a fabric under which every yard had been mined, by the long endeavour for half a century of an army of destroyers deliberate and involuntary, direct and oblique, such as the world has never at any other time beheld.

In 1727 Voltaire was returning from his exile in

England, to open the long campaign, of which he was from that time forth to the close of his days the brilliant and indomitable captain. He died in 1778, bright, resolute, humane, energetic, to the last. Thus Turgot's life was almost exactly contemporary with the pregnant era of Voltaire's activity. In the same spring in which Turgot died, Maurepas too came to his end, and Necker was dismissed. The last event was the signal at which the floods of the deluge fairly began to rise, and the revolutionary tide to swell.

It will be observed, moreover, that Turgot was born half a generation after the first race of the speculative revolutionists. Rousseau, Diderot, Helvétius, Condillac, D'Alembert, as well as the foreign Hume, so much the greatest of the whole band of innovators, because penetrating so much nearer to the depths, all came into the world which they were to confuse so unspeakably, in the half dozen years between 1711 and 1717. Turgot was of later stock and comes midway between these fathers of the new church, between Hume, Rousseau, Diderot, and the generation of its fiery practical apostles, Condorcet, Mirabeau, Robespierre.<sup>1</sup> The only other illustrious European of this decade was Adam Smith, who was born in 1723, and between whose labours and some of the most remarkable of Turgot's there was so much community. We cannot tell how far the gulf between Turgot and the earlier band was fixed by the accident that he did not belong to their generation in point of

<sup>1</sup> Born in 1743, 1749, and 1759 respectively.

ime. The accident is in itself only worth calling attention to, in connection with his distance from them in other and more important points than time.

The years of Turgot exactly bridge the interval between the ministry of the infamous Dubois and the ministry of the inglorious Calonne; between the despair and confusion of the close of the regency, and the despair and confusion of the last ten years of the monarchy. In 1727 we stand on the threshold of that far-resounding fiery workshop, where a hundred hands wrought the cunning implements and Cyclopean engines that were to serve in storming the hated badels of superstition and injustice. In 1781 we emerge from these subterranean realms into the open; to find ourselves surrounded by all the sounds and portents of imminent ruin. This, then, is the significance of the date of Turgot's birth.

His stock was Norman, and those who amuse themselves by finding a vital condition of the highest ability antiquity of blood, may quote the descent of Turgot support of their delusion. His biographers speak of Togut, a Danish Prince, who walked the earth a thousand years before the Christian era; and Saint Turgot in the eleventh century, the Prior of Durham, biographer of Bede, and first minister of Malcolm III. of Scotland. We shall do well not to linger in this too dark and frigid air. Let us pass over Togut and Saint Turgot; and the founder of a hospital in the thirteenth century; and the great

great-grandfather who sat as president of the Normans nobles in the States-General of 1614, and the grandfather who deserted arms for the toga. History is hardly concerned in this solemn marshalling of shades.

Even with Michel-Etienne, the father of Turgot we have here no dealing. Let it suffice to say that he held high municipal office in Paris, and performed its duties with exceptional honour and spirit, giving sumptuous fêtes, constructing useful public works and on one occasion jeoparding his life with a fine intrepidity that did not fail in his son, in appeasing a bloody struggle between two bodies of Swiss and French guards. There is in the library of the British Museum a folio of 1740, containing elaborate plates and letterpress, descriptive of the fêtes celebrated by the city of Paris with Michel-Etienne Turgot as its chief officer, on the occasion of the marriage of Louise-Elizabeth of France to Don Philip of Spain (August 1739). As one contemplates these courtly sumptuosities, La Bruyère's famous picture recurs to the mind, of far other scenes in the same gay land. 'We see certain wild animals, male and female, scattered over the fields, black, livid, all burnt by the sun, bound to the earth that they dig and work with unconquerable pertinacity; they have a sort of articulate voice, and when they rise on their feet, they show a human face; in fact they are men.' That these violent and humiliating contrasts are eternal and inevitable, is the last word of the dominant philosophy of society; and one of the reasons why Turgot's life

is worth studying, is that he felt in so pre eminent a degree the urgency of lightening the destiny of that livid, wild, hardly articulate, ever-toiling multitude.

The sum of the genealogical page is that Turgot inherited that position which, falling to worthy souls, is of its nature so invaluable, a family tradition of exalted courage and generous public spirit. There have been noble and patriotic men who lacked this inheritance, but we may be sure that even these would have fought the battle at greater advantage, if a magnanimous preference for the larger interests had come to them as a matter of instinctive prejudice, instead of being acquired as a matter of reason. The question of titular aristocracy is not touched by this consideration, for titular aristocracies postpone the larger interests to the narrow interests of their order. And Turgot's family was only of the secondary noblesse of the robe.

Turgot was the third son of his father. As the employments which persons of respectable family could enter were definite and stereotyped, there was little room for debate as to the calling for which a youth should prepare himself. Arms, civil administration, and the church, furnished the only three openings for a gentleman. The effects of this rigorous adherence to artificial and exclusive rules of caste were manifestly injurious to society, as such caste rules always are after a society has passed beyond a certain stage. To identify the interests of the richest and most powerful class with the interests of the

church, of the army, and of a given system of civil government, was indeed to give to that class the strongest motives for leaving the existing social order undisturbed. It unfortunately went too far in this direction, by fostering the strongest possible motives of hostility to such modifications in these gigantic departments as changing circumstances might make needful, in the breasts of the only men who could produce these modifications without a violent organic revolution. Such a system left too little course to spontaneity, and its curse is the curse of French genius. Some of its evil effects were obvious and on the surface. The man who should have been a soldier found himself saying mass and hearing confessions. Vauvenargues, who was born for diplomacy or literature, passed the flower of his days in the organised dreariness of garrisons and marches. In our own day communities and men who lead them have still to learn that no waste is so profuse and immeasurable, even from the material point of view, as that of intellectual energy, checked, uncultivated, ignored, or left without its opportunity. In France, until a very short time before the Revolution, we can hardly point to a single recognised usage which did not augment this waste. The eldest son usually preserved the rank and status of the family, whether civil or military. Turgot's eldest brother was to devote himself to civil administration, the next to be a soldier, and Turgot himself to be an ecclesiastic.

The second of the brothers, who began by following

arms, had as little taste for them as the future minister had for the church. It is rather remarkable that he seems to have had the same passion for administration, and he persuaded the government after the loss of Canada that Guiana, to be called Equinoctial France, would if well governed become some sort of equivalent for the northern possession. He was made Governor-general, but he had forgotten to take the climate into account, and the scheme came to an abortive end, involving him in a mass of confused quarrels which lasted some years. He had a marked love for botany, agriculture, and the like; was one of the founders of the Society of Agriculture in 1760; and was the author of various pieces on points of natural history.<sup>1</sup>

Turgot went as a boarder first to the college of Louis-le-Grand, then to that of Plessis; thence to the seminary of Saint Sulpice, where he took the degree of bachelor in theology; and from Saint Sulpice to the Sorbonne. His childhood and youth, like that of other men who have afterwards won love and admiration, have their stories. The affection of one biographer records how the pocket-money with which the young Turgot was furnished, used always instantly to disappear, no one knew how nor on what. It was discovered that he gave it to poor schoolfellows to enable them to buy books. Condorcet justly remarks

<sup>1</sup> Among others, of a little volume still to be met with in libraries, *Sur la manière de préparer les diverses curiosités d'histoire naturelle* (1768).



on this trait, that goodness and even generosity are not rare sentiments in childhood; but for these sentiments to be guided by such wisdom, this really seems the presage of an extraordinary man, all whose sentiments should be virtues, because they would always be controlled by reason.<sup>1</sup> It is at any rate certain that the union of profound benevolence with judgment, which this story prefigures, was the supreme distinction of Turgot's character. It is less pleasant to learn that Turgot throughout his childhood was always repulsed by his mother, who deemed him sullen, because he failed to make his bow with good grace, and was shy and taciturn. He fled from her visitors, and would hide himself behind sofa or screen; until dragged forth for social inspection.<sup>2</sup> This is only worth recording, because the same external awkwardness and lack of grace remained with Turgot to the end, and had something to do with the unpopularity that caused his fall. Perhaps he was thinking of his own childhood, when he wrote that fathers are often indifferent, or incessantly occupied with the details of business, and that he had seen the very parents who taught their children that there is nothing so noble as to make people happy, yet repulse the same children when urging some one's claim to charity or favour, and intimidate their young sensibility, instead of encouraging and training it.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Vie de Turgot*, p. 8 (ed. 1847).

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires de Morellet*, i. 12 (ed. 1822).

<sup>3</sup> Lettre à Madame de Graffigny. *Œuv.* ii. 793.

Morellet, one of the best known of the little group of friends and brother students at the Sorbonne, has recorded other authentic traits. Turgot, he says, united the simplicity of a child to a peculiar dignity that forced the respect of his comrades. His modesty and reserve were those of a girl, and those equivocal references in which the undisciplined animalism of youth often has a stealthy satisfaction, always called the blood to his cheeks and covered him with embarrassment. For all that, his spirit was full of a frank gaiety, and he would indulge in long bursts of laughter at a pleasantry or frolic that struck him. We may be glad to know this, because without express testimony to the contrary, there would have been some reason for suspecting that Turgot was defective in that most wholesome and human quality of a capacity for laughter.

The sensitive purity which Morellet notices, not without slight lifting of the eyebrow, remained with Turgot throughout his life. This was the more remarkable from the prevailing laxity of opinion upon this particular subject, perhaps the worst blemish upon the feeling and intelligence of the revolutionary schools. For it was not merely libertines, like Marnontel, making a plea for their own dissoluteness, who habitually spoke of these things with inconsiderate levity. Grave men of blameless life, like Jondorcet, deliberately argued in favour of leaving a loose rein to the mutual inclinations of men and women, and laughed at the time 'wasted in quenching

the darts of the flesh.<sup>1</sup> It is true that at D'Holbach's house, the headquarters of the dogmatic atheism in which the irreligious reaction culminated, this was the only theme on which freedom of speech was sometimes curtailed. But the fact that such a restriction should have been noticed, suggests that it was exceptional.<sup>2</sup> One good effect followed, let us admit. The virtuousness of continence was not treated as a superstition by those who vindicated it as Turgot did, but discussed like any other virtue; and was defended not as an intuition of faith, but as a reasoned conclusion of the judgment. It was permitted to occupy no solitary and mysterious throne, apart and away from other conditions and parts of human excellence and social wellbeing. There is intrinsically no harm in any virtue being accepted in the firm shape of a simple prejudice. On the contrary, there is a multitude of practical advantages in such a consolidated and spontaneously working order. But in considering conduct and character, and forming an opinion upon infractions of a virtue, we cannot be just unless we have analysed its conditions, and this is what the eighteenth century did defectively with regard to that particular virtue which so often usurps the name of all of the virtues together. In this respect Turgot's original purity of character withdrew him from the error of the time.

With the moral quality that we have seen, Morellet

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Turgot, *Œuv. de Condorcet*, i. 223. See also vi 264, and 523-526.

<sup>2</sup> Morellet, i. 133.

adds that for the intellectual side Turgot as a boy had a prodigious memory. He could retain as many as a hundred and eighty lines of verse, after hearing them twice, or sometimes even once. He knew by heart most of Voltaire's fugitive pieces, and long passages in his poems and tragedies. His predominant characteristics are described as penetration, and that other valuable faculty to which penetration is an indispensable adjunct, but which it by no means invariably implies—a spirit of broad and systematic co-ordination. The unusual precocity of his intelligence was perhaps imperfectly appreciated by his fellow-students, it led him so far beyond any point within their sight. It has been justly said of him that he passed at once from infancy to manhood, and was in the rank of sages before he had shaken off the dust of the playground. He was of the type of those who strangle serpents while yet in the cradle. We know the temperament which from the earliest hour consumes with eager desire for knowledge, and energises spontaneously with unceasing and joyful activity in that bright and pure morning of intellectual curiosity, which neither the dull tumultuous needs of life nor the mists of spiritual misgiving have yet come up to make dim. Of this temperament was Turgot in a superlative degree, and its fire never abated in him from college days, down to the last hours while he lay racked with irremediable anguish.

To a certain extent this was the glorious mark of all the best minds of the epoch; from Voltaire

downwards, they were inflamed by an inextinguishable and universal curiosity. Voltaire hardly left a single corner of the field entirely unexplored in science, poetry, history, philosophy. Rousseau wrote a comic opera and was an ardent botanist. Diderot wrote, and wrote well and intelligently, *de omni scibili*, and was the author alike of the Letters on the Blind and Jacques le Fataliste. No era was ever so little the era of the specialist.

The society of the Sorbonne corresponded exactly to a college at one of our universities, and will be distinguished by the careful reader from the faculty of theology in the university, which was usually, but not always, composed of *docteurs de Sorbonne*. It consisted of a large number of learned men in the position of fellows, and a smaller number of younger students, who lived together just as undergraduates do, in separate apartments, but with common hall, library, and garden. One of Turgot's masters, Sigorgne, was the first to teach in the university the Newtonian principles of astronomy, instead of the Cartesian hypothesis of vortices. As is well known, Cartesianism had for various reasons taken a far deeper root in France than it ever did here, and held its place a good generation after Newtonian ideas were accepted and taught at Oxford and Cambridge.<sup>1</sup> Voltaire's translation of the *Principia*, which he was prevented by the Cartesian chancellor, D'Aguesseau, from publishing

<sup>1</sup> Whewell's *Hist. Induct. Sciences*, ii. 147-159.

until 1738, overthrew the reigning system, and gave a strong impulse to scientific inquiry.

Turgot mastered the new doctrine with avidity. In the acute letter of criticism which, while still at the Sorbonne, he addressed to Buffon, he pointedly urged it as the first objection to that writer's theory of the formation and movements of the planets, that any attempt at fundamental explanations of this kind was a departure from 'the simplicity and safe reserve of the philosophy of Newton.'<sup>1</sup> He only, however, made a certain advance in mathematics. He appears to have had no peculiar or natural aptitude for this study; though he is said to have constantly blamed himself for not having gone more deeply into it. It is hardly to be denied that mathematical genius and philosophic genius do not always go together. The precision, definiteness, and accurate limitations of the method of the one, are usually unfriendly to the brooding, tentative, uncircumscribed meditation which is the productive humour in the other. Turgot was essentially of the philosophising temper. Though the activity of his intelligence was incessant, his manner of work was the reverse of quick. 'When he applied to work,' says Morellet, 'when it was a question of writing or doing, he was slow and loitering. Slow, because he insisted on finishing all he did perfectly, according to his own conception of perfection, which

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv. de Turgot*, ii. 783. (Edition of Messrs. Eugène Daire and H. Dussard, published in the *Collection des Principaux Economistes*, published by Guillaumin, 1844.)

was most difficult of attainment, even down to the minutest detail; and because he would not receive assistance, being never contented with what he had not done himself. He also loitered a great deal, losing time in arranging his desk and cutting his pens, not that he was not thinking profoundly through all this trifling; but mere thinking did not advance his work.<sup>1</sup> We may admit, perhaps, that the work was all the better for the thinking that preceded it, and that the time which Turgot seemed to waste in cutting his pens and setting his table in order was more fruitfully spent than the busiest hours of most men.

We know the books which Turgot and his friends devoured with ardour. Locke, Bayle, Voltaire, Buffon, relieved Clarke, Leibnitz, Spinoza, Cudworth; and constant discussions among themselves both cleared up and enlarged what they read.<sup>2</sup> One of the disputants, certainly not the least amiable, has painted his own part in these discussions: 'I was violent in discussion,' says the good Morellet, as he was pleasantly called, 'but without my antagonist being able to reproach me with a single insult; and sometimes I used to spit blood, after a debate in which I had not allowed a single personality to escape me.'<sup>3</sup>

Another member of the circle was Loménie de Brienne, who, in long years after, was chief minister of France for a narrow space through the momentous winter of 1787 and the spring of the next year, filling the gap between Calonne and Necker in a desperate

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, i. 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* i. 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* i. 19.

and fatal manner. Loménie's ambition dated from his youth; and it was always personal and mean. While Turgot, his friend, was earnestly meditating on the destinies of the race and the conditions of their development, Loménie was dreaming only of the restoration of his ancestral château of Brienne. Though quite without means, he planned this in his visions on a scale of extreme costliness and magnificence. The dreams fell true. Money came to the family, and the château was built exactly as he had projected it, at a cost of two million francs.<sup>1</sup> His career was splendid. He was clever, industrious, and persevering after his fashion, astute, lively, pretentious, a person ever by well-planned hints leading you to suppose his unrevealed profundity to be bottomless; in a word, in all respects an impostor.<sup>2</sup> He espoused that richly dowered bride the Church, rose to be Archbishop of Toulouse, and would have risen to be Archbishop of Paris, but for the King's over-scrupulous conviction that 'an Archbishop of Paris must at least believe in God.' He became an immense favourite with Marie Antoinette and the court, was made Minister 'like Richelieu and Mazarin,' and after having postured and played tricks in face of the bursting deluge, and given the government the final impulse into the abyss of bankruptcy, was dismissed with the rich archbishopric

<sup>1</sup> Morellet's *Mémoires*, i. 17-21; 262-270; and ii. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Marmontel's *Mémoires*, bk. xiii.; Morellet, however, with persevering friendliness, denies the truth of Marmontel's picture (ii. 465).



of Sens and a cardinal's hat for himself, and good sinecures for his kinsfolk. His last official act was to send for the 20,000 livres for his month's salary, not fully due. His brother, the Count of Brienne, remained in office as Minister of War. He was a person of no talent, his friends allowed, but 'assisted by a good chief clerk, he would have made a good minister; he meant well.' This was hardly a sufficient reason for letting him take 100,000 francs out of an impoverished treasury for the furniture of his residence. The hour, however, was just striking, and the knife was sharpened.

All his paltry honour and glory Loménie de Brienne enjoyed for a season, until the Jacobins laid violent hands upon him. He poisoned himself in his own palace, just as a worse thing was about to befall him. Alas, poetic justice is the exception in history, and only once in many generations does the drama of the state criminal rise to an artistic fifth act. This was in 1794. In 1750 a farewell dinner had been given in the rooms of the Abbé de Brienne at the Sorbonne, and the friends made an appointment for a game of tennis behind the church of the Sorbonne in the year 1800.<sup>1</sup> The year came, but no Loménie, nor Turgot, and the Sorbonne itself had vanished.

When the time arrived for his final acceptance of an ecclesiastical destination, Turgot felt that honourable repugnance, which might have been anticipated alike from his morality and his intelligence, to enter

<sup>1</sup> Morellet, i. 21.

into an engagement which would irrevocably bind him for the rest of his life, either always to hold exactly the same opinions, or else to continue to preach them publicly after he had ceased to hold them privately. No certainty of worldly comfort and advantage could in his eyes counterbalance the possible danger and shame of a position, which might place him between the two alternatives of stifling his intelligence and outraging his conscience—the one by blind, unscrutinising, and immovable acceptance of all the dogmas and sentiments of the Church; the other by the inculcation as truths of what he believed to be false, and the proscription as falsehoods of what he believed to be true. The horror and disgrace of such a situation were too striking for one who used his mind and acted on principle, to run any risk of that situation becoming his own. An ambitious timeserver like Loménie, or a contented adherent of use and wont like Morellet, might well regard such considerations as the products of a weak and eccentric scrupulosity. Turgot was of other calibre, holding it to be only a degree less unprincipled than the avowed selfishness of the adventurer, to contract so serious an engagement on the strength of common hearsay and current usage, without deliberate personal reflection and inquiry.

At the close of his course at the Sorbonne, he wrote a letter to his father giving the reasons for this resolution to abandon all idea of an ecclesiastical career and the advancement which it offered him, and seeking

his consent for the change from Church to law. His father approved of the resolution, and gave the required consent. As Turgot had studied law as well as theology, no time was lost, and he formally entered the profession of the law as Deputy-Counsellor of the Procureur-Général at the beginning of 1752.

His college friends had remonstrated warmly at this surrender of a brilliant prospect. A little deputation of young abbés, fresh from their vows, waited on him at his rooms; in that humour of blithe and sagacious good-will which comes so naturally to men who believe they have just found out Fortune's trick and yoked her fast for ever to the car, they declared that he was about to do something opposed to his own interest and inconsistent with his usual good sense. He was a younger son of a Norman house, and therefore poor; the law without a competency involved no consideration, and he could hope for no advancement in it: whereas in the Church his family, being possessed of influence and credit, would have no difficulty in procuring for him excellent abbeys and in good time a rich bishopric; here he could realise all his fine dreams of administration, and without ceasing to be a churchman could play the statesman to his heart's content. In one profession he would waste his genius in arguing trifling private affairs, while in the other he would be of the highest usefulness to his country, and would acquire the greatest reputation. Turgot, however, insisted on placing genius and reputation below the necessity of

being honest. The object of an oath might be of the least important kind, but he could neither allow himself to play with it, nor believe that a man could abase his profession in public opinion, without at the same time abasing himself. '*You shall do as you will,*' he said; '*for my own part, it is impossible for me to wear a mask all my life.*'<sup>1</sup>

His clear intelligence revolted from the dominant sophisms of that time, by which philosophers as well as ecclesiastics brought falsehood and hypocrisy within the four corners of a decent doctrine of truth and morality. The churchman manfully argued that he could be most useful to the world if he were well off and highly placed. The philosopher contended that as the world would punish him if he avowed what he had written or what he believed, he was fully warranted in lying to the world as to his writing and belief; for is not the right to have the truth told to you, a thing forfeitable by tyranny and oppression?<sup>2</sup> Truth is

<sup>1</sup> Dupont de Nemours. Condorcet's *Vie de Turgot*, pp. 8-10.

<sup>2</sup> 'La nécessité de mentir pour désavouer un ouvrage est une extrémité qui répugne également à la conscience et à la noblesse du caractère; mais le crime est pour les hommes injustes qui rendent ce désaveu nécessaire à la sûreté de celui qu'ils y ont consenti. Si vous avez érigé en crime ce qui n'en est pas un, si vous avez porté atteinte, par des lois absurdes ou par des lois arbitraires, au droit naturel qu'ont tous les hommes, non seulement d'avoir une opinion, mais de la rendre publique, alors vous méritez de perdre celui qu'a chaque homme d'entendre la liberté de la bouche d'un autre, droit qui fonde seule l'obligation naturelle de ne pas mentir.'—Condorcet, *Vie de Voltaire* *Œuv.* iv. 33, 34).

not mocked, and these sophisms bore their fruit in due season. Perhaps if there had been found on either side in France a hundred righteous men like Turgot, who would not fight in masks, the end might have been other than it was. The lesson remains for those who dream that by reducing pretence to a nicely graduated system, and by leaving an exactly measured margin between what they really believe and what they feign to believe, they are serving the great cause of order. French history informs us what becomes of social order so served. After all, no man can be sure that it is required of him to save society every man can be sure that he is called upon to keep himself clean from mendacity and equivocation. Such was Turgot's view.

We have said that Turgot disdained to fight under a mask. There was one exception, and only one. In 1754 there appeared two letters, nominally from an ecclesiastic to a magistrate, and entitled *Le Conciliateur*. Here it is enough to say that they were intended to enforce the propriety and duty of religious toleration. In a letter to a friend we find Turgot saying, 'Although the *Conciliator* is of my principles, and those of our friend, I am astonished at your conjectures; it is neither his style nor mine.'<sup>1</sup> Yet Turgot had written it. This is his one public literary equivocation. Let us at all events, allow that it was resorted to, not to break the law with safety, nor to cloak a malicious

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* ii. 685. Morellet says that it was written by Loménie de Brienne, 19.

attack on a person, but to give additional weight by means of a harmless prosopopœia, to an argument for the noblest of principles.<sup>1</sup>

Before Turgot entered the great world, he had already achieved an amount of success in philosophic speculation, which placed him in the front rank of social thinkers. To that passion for study and the acquisition of knowledge which is not uncommon in youth, as it is one of the most attractive of youth's qualities, there was added in him what is unhappily not common in men and women of any age—an active impulse to use his own intelligence upon the information which he gained from books and professors. He was no conceited or froward caviller at authority, nor a rebel against established teachers and governors. His understanding seriously craved a full and independent satisfaction, and could draw this only from laborious meditation, which should either disclose the inadequacy of the grounds for an opinion, or else establish it, with what would be to him a new and higher because an independently acquired, conclusiveness.

His letter to Buffon, to which we have already referred, is an illustration of this wise, and never suspicious nor ungracious, caution in receiving ideas. Neither Buffon's reputation, nor the glow of his style, nor the dazzling ingenuity and grandeur of his conceptions—all of them so well calculated, at one-and-twenty, to throw even a vigilant intelligence off its

<sup>1</sup> See the note of Dupont de Nemours, *ad loc.*

guard—could divert Turgot from the prime duty of confronting a theory with facts. But for explaining the formation of the earth, other planets, and their lateral movement, hypothesis that a comet had fallen obliquely on the sun, driven off certain portions of its contents, and that these portions, in a state of fusion, were carried to different distances in proportion to their mass and the force originally impressed on them, Buffon may have been actuated, both here and in his famous hypothesis of reproduction, by a desire to propound a true and durable explanation, rather than to arrest by a bold and comprehensive generalization that attention, which is only imperfectly touched by mere collections of particular facts. The enthusiasm which even the most unscientific speculations of Descartes had given to European thought, was a standing temptation to philosophers not to discard nor relax patient observation, but to bind together the results which they arrived at in this process, by means of some hardy hypothesis, which might be true or not, but it was at any rate calculated to strike the imagination, which ever craves what is new, and to stimulate discussion and further discovery by sending assailants and defenders alike in search of new facts, to confirm or overthrow the position.

<sup>1</sup> See Condorcet's *éloge* on Buffon (*Œuv.* iii. 335); passage from Bourdon, quoted in Whewell's *Hist. Induct.* iii. 348.

Turgot was less sensible of these possible advantages, than he was alive to the certain dangers of such method. He perceived that to hold a theory otherwise than as an inference from facts, is to have strong motive for looking at the facts in a predetermined light, or for ignoring them; an involuntary predisposition most fatal to the discovery of truth, which is nothing more than the conformity of our conception of facts to their adequately observed order. Why, he asks, do you replunge us into the night of hypotheses, justifying the Cartesians and their three elements and their vortices? And whence comes our comet? Was it within the sphere of the sun's traction? If not, how could it fall from the sphere of the other bodies, and fall on the sun, which was not acting on it? If it was, it must have fallen perpendicularly, not obliquely; and, therefore, if it imparted a lateral movement, this direction must have been impressed on it. And, if so, why should not it have impressed this movement upon the planets directly, as easily as upon the comet to communicate to them? Finally, how could the planets have left a body of the sun without falling back into it again? What curve did they describe in leaving it, so as never to return? Can you suppose that gravitation could cause the same body to describe a spiral and an ellipse? In the same exact spirit, Turgot brings his own facts to bear on Buffon's theory of the arrangement of the terrestrial and marine divisions of the earth's surface. The whole criticism he sent



to Buffon anonymously, to assure him that the writer had no other motive than the interest he took in the discovery of truth and the perfection of a great work.<sup>1</sup>

Turgot's is probably the only case where the biographer has, in emerging from the days of school and college, at once to proceed to expound and criticise the intellectual productions of his hero, and straightway to present fruit and flower of a time that usually does no more than prepare the unseen roots. There is, perhaps, a wider and more stimulating attraction of a dramatic kind in the study of characters which present a history of active and continuous growth; which, while absolutely free from flimsy caprice and disordered eccentricity, are ever surprising our attention by an unsuspected word of calm judgment or fertile energy, a fresh interest or an added sympathy, by the disappearance of some crudity or the assimilation of some new and richer quality. Of such gradual rise into full maturity we have here nothing to record. As a student Turgot had already formed the list of a number of works which he designed to execute; poems, tragedies, philosophic romances, vast treatises on physics, history, geography, politics, morals, metaphysics, and language.<sup>2</sup> Of some he had drawn out the plan, and even these plans and fragments possess a novelty and depth of view that belong even to the integrity of few works.

<sup>1</sup> October, 1748. *Œuv.* ii. 782-784.

<sup>2</sup> Condorcet's *Vie de Turgot*, 14.

Before passing on to the more scientific speculations of this remarkable intelligence, it is worth while to notice his letter to Madame de Graffigny, both for the intrinsic merit and scope of the ideas it contains and for the proof it furnishes of the interest, at once early and profound, which he took in moral questions lying at the very bottom, as well of sound character, as of a healthy society. Turgot's early passion for literature had made him seize an occasion of being introduced to even so moderately renowned a professor of it as Madame de Graffigny. He happened to be intimate with her niece, who afterwards became the lively and witty wife of Helvétius, somewhat to the surprise of Turgot's friends. For although he persuaded Mademoiselle de Ligniville to present him to her aunt, and though he assiduously attended Madame de Graffigny's literary gatherings, Turgot could constantly quit the circle of men of letters for the sake of a game of battledore with the comely and attractive niece. Hence the astonishment of men that from such familiarity there grew no stronger passion, and that whatever the causes of such reserve, the only issue was a tender and lasting friendship.<sup>1</sup>

Madame de Graffigny had begged Turgot's opinion upon the manuscript of a work composed, as so many others were, after the pattern of Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*,—now nearly thirty years old,—and bearing the accurately imitative title of *Lettres Peruviennes*. A Peruvian comes to Europe, and sends to a friend or

<sup>1</sup> Morellet, i. 140.

mistress in Peru a series of remarks on civilisation. Goldsmith's delightful *Citizen of the World* is the best known type in our own literature of this primitive form of social criticism. The effect upon common opinion of criticism cast in such a mould, presenting familiar habits, institutions, and observances, in a striking and unusual light, was to give a kind of Socratic stimulus to people's ideas about education, civilisation, conduct, and the other topics springing from a comparison between the manners of one community and another. That one of the two, whether Peru, or China, or Persia, was a community drawn mainly from the imagination, did not render the contrast any the less effective in stirring men's minds.

By the middle of the century the air was full of ideas upon these social subjects. The temptation was irresistible to turn from the confusion of squalor, oppression, license, distorted organisation, penetrative disorder, to ideal states comprising a little range of simple circumstances, and a small number of types of virtuous and unsophisticated character. Much came of the relief thus sought and found. It was the beginning of the subversive process, for it taught men to look away from ideas of practical amelioration. The genius of Rousseau gave these dreams the shape which, in many respects, so unfortunately for France, finally attracted the bulk of the national sentiment and sympathy. But the vivid, humane, and inspiring pages of *Emile* were not published until ten years

fter Turgot's letter to Madame de Graffigny :<sup>1</sup> a circumstance which may teach us that in moral as in physical discoveries, though one man may take the final step and reap the fame, the conditions have been prepared beforehand. It is almost discouraging to think that we may reproduce such passages as the following, without being open to the charge of slaying the slain, though one hundred and twenty years have elapsed since it was written.

'Let Zilia show that our too arbitrary institutions have too often made us forget nature ; that we have been the dupes of our own handiwork, and that the savage who does not know how to consult nature knows how to follow her. Let her criticise our pedantry, for it is this that constitutes our education of the present day. Look at the Rudiments ; they begin by insisting on stuffing into the heads of children a crowd of the most abstract ideas. Those whom nature in her variety summons to her by all her objects, we fasten up in a single spot, we occupy them on words which cannot convey any sense to them, because the sense of words can only come with ideas, and ideas only come by degrees, starting from sensible objects.<sup>2</sup> But, besides, we insist on their acquiring them without the help that we have had, we whom age and experience have formed. We keep their imagination prisoner, we deprive them of the

<sup>1</sup> Written in 1751. *Œuv.* ii, 785-794.

<sup>2</sup> 'On sera surpris que je compte l'étude des langues au nombre des inutilités de l'éducation,' etc.—*Emile*, bk. ii.

sight of objects by which nature gives to the savage his first notions of all things, of all the sciences even. We have not the coup-d'œil of nature.

‘It is the same with morality; general ideas again spoil all. People take great trouble to tell a child that he must be just, temperate, and virtuous; and has it the least idea of virtue? Do not say to your son, *Be virtuous*, but make him find pleasure in being so; develop within his heart the germ of sentiment that nature has placed there.<sup>1</sup> There is often much more need for bulwarks against education, than against nature. Give him opportunities of being truthful, liberal, compassionate; rely on the human heart; leave these precious seeds to bloom in the air which surrounds them; do not stifle them under a quantity of frames and network. I am not one of those who want to reject general and abstract ideas; they are necessary; but I by no means think them in their place in our method of instruction. I would have them come to children as they come to men, by degrees.

‘Another article of our education, which strikes me as bad and ridiculous, is our severity towards these poor children. They do something silly; we take them up as if it were extremely important. There is a multitude of these follies, of which they will cure themselves by age alone. But people do not count on that; they insist that the son should be well bred, and they overwhelm him with little rules of

<sup>1</sup> See Locke, *Of Education*, §§ 81, 184, etc.

vility, often frivolous, which can only harass him, as he does not know the reason for them. I think it could be enough to hinder him from being troublesome to the persons that he sees.<sup>1</sup> The rest will come, little by little. Inspire him with the desire of pleasing; he will soon know more of the art than all the masters could teach him. People wish again that a child should be grave; they think it wise for it not to run, and fear every moment that it will fall. What happens? You weary and enfeeble it. We have especially forgotten that it is a part of education to form the body."<sup>2</sup>

The reader who remembers Locke's *Thoughts concerning Education* (published in 1690), and the particularly homely prescriptions upon the subjects of the infant body with which that treatise opens, will recognise the source of Turgot's inspiration. The same may be said of the other wise passages in this letter, upon the right attitude of a father towards his

<sup>1</sup> 'La seule leçon de morale qui convienne à l'enfance, et la plus importante à tout âge, est de ne jamais faire de mal à personne,' etc. *Emile*, bk. ii. 'Never trouble yourself about these faults in them, which you know age will cure. And therefore want of well-fashioned civility in the carriage . . . should be the parents' least care while they are young. If his tender mind be filled with a veneration for his parents and teachers, which consists in love and esteem and a fear to offend them; and with respect and good-will to all people; that respect will of itself teach these ways of expressing it, which he observes most acceptable,' etc.—Locke, *Of Education*, §§ 63, 67, etc.

<sup>2</sup> 'Vous donnez la science, à la bonne heure; moi je m'occupe de l'instrument propre à l'acquérir,' etc.—*Emile*.

child. It was not merely the metaphysics of the sage and positive Locke which laid the revolutionary train in France. This influence extended over the whole field, and even Rousseau confesses the obligations of the imaginary governor of Emile to the real Locke.

We are again plainly in the Lockian atmosphere, when Turgot speaks of men being the dupes of 'general ideas, which are true because drawn from nature, but which people embrace with a narrow stiffness that makes them false, because they no longer combine them with circumstances, taking for absolute what is only the expression of a relation.' The merit of this and the other educational parts of the piece, is not their originality, but that kind of complete and finished assimilation which is all but tantamount to independent thought, and which in certain conditions may be much more practically useful.

Not less important to the happiness of men than the manner of their education, is their own cultivation of a wise spirit of tolerance in conduct. 'I should like to see explained,' Turgot says, 'the causes of alienation and disgust between people who love one another. I believe that after living awhile with men, we perceive that bickerings, ill-humours, teasings on trifles, perhaps cause more troubles and divisions among them than serious things. How many bitter-nesses have their origin in a word, in forgetfulness of some slight observances. If people would only weigh in an exact balance so many little wrongs, if they would only put themselves in the place of those who

have to complain of them, if they would only reflect how many times they have themselves given way to rumours, how many things they have forgotten! A single word spoken in disparagement of our intelligence is enough to make us irreconcilable, and yet how often have we been deceived in the very same matter. How many persons of understanding have we taken for fools? Why should not others have the same privilege as ourselves? . . . Ah, what address is needed to live together, to be compliant without cringing, to expose a fault without harshness, to correct without imperious air, to remonstrate without ill-temper!' All this is wise and good, but, alas, as Turgot had occasion by and by to say, little comes of giving rules instead of breeding habits.

It is curious that Turgot as early in his career as this should have protested against one of the most dangerous doctrines of the *philosophe* school. 'I have long thought,' he says, 'that our nation needs to have marriage and true marriage preached to it. We contract marriages ignobly, from views of ambition or interest; and as many of them are unhappy in consequence, we may see growing up from day to day a fashion of thinking that is extremely mischievous to the community, to manners, to the stability of families, and to domestic happiness and virtue.'<sup>1</sup> Looseness of opinion as to the family and the conditions of its wellbeing and stability, was a flaw that ran through the whole period of revolutionary thought. It was

<sup>1</sup> ii. 790.



not surprising that the family should come in for its share of destructive criticism, along with the other elements of the established system, but it is a proof of the solidity of Turgot's understanding that he should from the first have detected the mischievousness of this side of the great social attack. Nor did subsequent discussion with the champions of domestic license have any effect upon his opinion.

He makes the protest which the moralist makes, and has to make in every age, against the practice of determining the expediency of a marriage by considerations of money or rank. There is a great abuse, he says, in the manner in which marriages are made without the two persons most concerned having any knowledge of one another, and solely under the authority of the parents, who are guided either by fortune, or else by station, that will one day translate itself into fortune. 'I know,' he says, 'that even marriages of inclination do not always succeed. So from the fact that sometimes people make mistakes in their choice, it is concluded that we ought never to choose.' Condorcet, we may remember, many years after, insisted on the banishment by public opinion of avaricious and mercenary considerations from marriage, as one of the most important means of diminishing the great inequalities in the accumulation of wealth.<sup>1</sup>

In the same letter he took sides by anticipation in another cardinal controversy of the epoch, by declaring

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv. de Condorcet*, vi. 245.

a preference for the savage over the civilised state to be a 'ridiculous declamation.' This strange and fatal debate had been opened by Rousseau's memorable first Discourse, which was given to the world in 1750. Preference for the savage state was the peculiar form assumed by emotional protests against the existing system of the distribution of wealth. Turgot from first to last resisted the whole spirit of such protests. In this letter, where he makes his first approach to the subject, he insists on inequality of conditions, as alike necessary and useful. It is necessary 'because men are not born equal; because their strength, their intelligence, their passions, would be perpetually overthrowing that momentous equilibrium among them, which the laws might have established.'

'What would society be without this inequality of conditions? Each individual would be reduced to mere necessities, or rather there would be very many to whom mere necessities would be by no means assured. Men cannot labour without implements and without the means of subsistence, until the gathering in of the produce. Those who have not had intelligence enough, or any opportunity to acquire these things, have no right to take them away from one who has earned and deserved them by his labour. If the idle and ignorant were to despoil the industrious and the skilful, all works would be discouraged, and misery would become universal. It is alike more just and more useful that all those who have fallen behind either in wit or in good fortune, should lend their



perfect social equality, Turgot did not show a more lively sense of the need for lessening and softening unavoidable inequalities of condition. However capable these inequalities may be of scientific defence, they are none the less on that account in need of incessant and strenuous practical modification; and it is one of the most serious misfortunes of society, and is unhappily long likely to remain so, that since the absorbing question of the reformation of the economic conditions of the social union has come more and more prominently to the front, gradually but irresistibly thrusting behind both its religious and its political conditions, zeal for the amelioration of the common lot has in so few auspicious instances been according to knowledge; while the professors of science have been more careful to compose narrow apologies for individual selfishness, than to extend as widely as possible the limits set by demonstrable principle to the improvement of the common life.

We may notice too in this Letter, what so many of Turgot's allies and friends were disposed to complain of, but what will commend him to a less newly emancipated and therefore a less fanatical generation. There is a conspicuous absence of that peculiar boundlessness of hope, that zealous impatience for the instant realisation and fruition of all the inspirations of philosophic intelligence, which carried others immediately around him so excessively far in the creed of Perfectibility. 'Liberty! I answer with a sigh, maybe that men are not worthy of thee!

Equality! They would yearn after thee, but cannot attain!' Compared with the confident exultation and illimitable sense of the worth of man which distinguished that time, there is something like depression here, as in many other places in Turgot's writings. It is usually less articulate, and is rather conveyed by a running undertone, which so often reveals more of a writer's true mood and temper than is seen in his words, giving to them, by some unconscious and inscrutable process, living effects upon the reader's sense like those of eye and voice and accompanying gesture.

Dejection, however, is perhaps not the most proper word for the humour of reserved and grave suspense, natural in those rare spirits who have recognised how narrow is the way of truth and how few there be that enter therein, and what prolonged concurrence of favouring hazards with gigantic endeavour is needed for each smallest step in the halting advancement of the race. With Turgot this was not the result of mere sentimental brooding. It had a deliberate and reasoned foundation in historical study. He was patient and not hastily sanguine as to the speedy coming of the millennial future, exactly because history had taught him to measure the lagging paces of the past. The secret of the intense hopefulness of that time lay in the mournfully erroneous conviction that the one condition of progress is plenteous increase of light. Turgot saw very early that this is not so. '*It is not error,*' he wrote, in a

saying that every champion of a new idea should have ever in letters of flame before his eyes, '*which opposes the progress of truth: it is indolence, obstinacy, the spirit of routine, everything that favours inaction.*'<sup>1</sup>

The others left these potent elements of obstruction out of calculation and account. With Turgot they were the main facts to be considered, and the main forces to be counteracted. It is the mark of the highest kind of union between sagacious, firm, and clear-sighted intelligence, and a warm and steadfast glow of social feeling, when a man has learnt how little the effort of the individual can do either to hasten or direct the current of human destiny, and yet finds in effort his purest pleasure and his most constant duty. If we owe honour to that social endeavour which is stimulated and sustained by an enthusiastic confidence in speedy and full fruition, we surely owe it still more to those, who knowing how remote and precarious and long beyond their own days is the hour of fruit, yet need no other spur nor sustenance than bare hope, and in this strive and endeavour and still endeavour. Here lies the true strength, and it was the possession of this strength and the constant call and strain upon it, which gave Turgot in mien and speech a gravity that revolted the frivolous or indifferent, and seemed cold and timorous to the enthusiastic and urgent. Turgot had discovered that there was a law in the history of men, and he knew how this law limited and conditioned progress.

<sup>1</sup> (*Euv.* ii. 672.

## II.

In 1750 Turgot, then only in his twenty-fourth year, was appointed to the honorary office of Prior of the Sorbonne, an elective distinction conferred annually, as it appears, on some meritorious or highly connected student. It was held in the following year by Loménio de Brienne. In this capacity Turgot read two Latin dissertations, one at the opening of the session, and the other at its close. The first of these was upon 'The Advantages that the Establishment of Christianity has conferred upon the Human Race.'

Its value, as might well have been expected from the circumstances of its production, is not very high. It is pitched in a tone of exaltation that is eminently unfavourable to the permanently profitable treatment of such a subject. There are in it too many of those eloquent and familiar commonplaces of orthodox history, by which the doubter tries to warm himself into belief, and the believer dreams that he is corroborating faith by reason. The assembly for whom his discourse was prepared, could hardly have endured the apparition in the midst of them of what both rigorous justice and accurate history required to have taken into account on the other side. It was not to be expected that a young student within the precincts of the Sorbonne should have any eyes for the evil with which the forms of the Christian religion, like other growths of the human mind, from the lowest

forms of savage animism upwards, have ever alloyed its good. The absence of all reference to one half of what the annals of the various Christian churches have to teach us, robs the first of Turgot's discourses of that serious and durable quality which belongs to all his other writings.

It is fair to point out that the same vicious exclusiveness was practised by the enemies of the Church, and that if history was to one of the two contending factions an exaggerated enumeration of the blessings of Christianity, it was to their passionate rivals only a monotonous catalogue of curses. Of this temper we have a curious illustration in the circumstance that Dupont, Turgot's intimate friend of later years, who collected and published his works, actually took the trouble to suppress the opening of this very Discourse, in which Turgot had replied to the reproach often made against Christianity, of being useful only for a future life.<sup>1</sup>

In the first Discourse, Turgot considers the influence of Christianity first upon human nature, and secondly on political societies. One feature at least deserves remark, and this is that in spite both of a settled partiality, and a certain amount of the common form of theology, yet at bottom and putting some phrases apart, religion is handled, and its workings traced, much as they would have been if treated as admittedly secular forces. And this was somewhat. Let us proceed to analyse what Turgot says.

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* ii. 586, n.



1. Before the preaching and acceptance of the new faith, all nations alike were plunged into the most extravagant superstitions. The most frightful dissoluteness of manners was encouraged by the example of the gods themselves. Every passion and nearly every vice was the object of a monstrous deification. A handful of philosophers existed, who had learnt no better lesson from their reason, than to despise the multitude of their fellows. In the midst of the universal contagion, the Jews alone remained pure. Even the Jews were affected with a narrow and sterile pride, which proved how little they appreciated the priceless treasure that was entrusted to their keeping. What were the effects of the appearance of Christ, and the revelation of the gospel? It inspired men with a tender zeal for the truth, and by establishing the necessity of a body of teachers for the instruction of nations, made studiousness and intellectual application indispensable in a great number of persons.

Consider, again, the obscurity, incertitude, and incongruousness, that marked the ideas of the wisest of the ancients upon the nature of man and of God, and the origin of creation; the Ideas of Plato, for instance, the Numbers of Pythagoras, the theurgic extravagances of Plotinus and Porphyry and Iamblichus; and then measure the contributions made by the scholastic theologians, whose dry method has undergone so much severe condemnation, to the instruments by which knowledge is enlarged and made accurate. It was the Church, moreover, which

sed the Northern barbarians, and so preserved West from the same barbarism and desolation which the triumphs of Mahometanism replaced knowledge and arts and prosperity of the East. to the services of the Church that we owe the situation of a knowledge of the ancient tongues, if this knowledge, and the possession of the erpieces of thought and feeling and form, the r of the ancient European mind, remained so long oductive, still religious organisation deserves our tude equally for keeping these great treasures for ier times. They survived, as trees stripped by r of their leaves survive through frost and storm, ve new blossoms in a new spring.

is much on the intellectual side; but how can scribe the moral transformation which the new brought to pass? Men who had hitherto only ded gods as beings to be entreated to avert ill or w blessing, now learnt the nobler emotion of it love for a divinity of supreme power and icence. The new faith, besides kindling love for inflamed the kindred sentiment of love for men, whom it declared to be the children of God, one family with a common father. Julian himself witness to the fidelity with which the Christians, a faith he hated or despised, tended the sick and he poor, not only of their own association, but also who were without the fold. The horrible ce of exposing new-born infants, which outraged e, and yet did not touch the heart nor the

understanding of a Numa, an Aristotle, a Confucius was first proscribed by the holy religion of Christ. If shame and misery still sometimes, in the hearts of poor outcast mothers, overpower the horror which Christianity first inspired, it is still the same religion which has opened sheltering places for the unhappy victims of such a practice, and provided means for rearing foundlings into useful citizens.

Christian teaching, by reviving the principles of sensibility within the breast, may be said 'to have in some sort unveiled human nature to herself.' If the cruelty of old manners has abated, do we not owe the improvement to such courageous priests as Ambrose, who refused admission into the church to Theodosius, because in punishing a guilty city he had hearkened to the voice rather of wrath than of justice; or as that Pope who insisted that Lewis the Seventh should expiate by a rigorous penance the sack and burning of Vitry.<sup>1</sup> It is not to a Titus, a Trajanus, an Antoninus, that we owe the abolition of the bloody gladiatorial games; it is to Jesus Christ. Virtuous unbelievers have not seldom been the apostles of benevolence and humanity, but we rarely see them in the asylums of misery. Reason speaks, but it is religion that makes men act. How much dearer to us than the splendid monuments of antique taste, power, and greatness, are those Gothic edifices reared for the poor and the orphan, those far nobler monuments of the piety of Christian

<sup>1</sup> See Martin's *Hist. de la France*, iii. 422. Or Morison's *Life of Saint Bernard*, bk. iii. ch. vi.

princes and the power of Christian faith. The rudeness of their architecture may wound the delicacy of our taste, but they will be ever beloved by feeling hearts. Let others admire in the retreat prepared for those who have sacrificed in battle their lives or their health for the State, all the gathered riches of the arts, displaying in the eyes of all the nations the magnificence of Lewis the Fourteenth, and carrying our renown to the level of that of Greece and Rome. What I will admire is such a use of those arts; the sublime glory of serving the weal of men raises them higher than they had ever been at Rome or at Athens.'

2. Let us turn from the action of the Christian faith in modifying the passions of the individual, to its influence upon societies of men. How has Christianity ameliorated the great art of government, with reference to the two characteristic aims of that art, the happiness of communities, and their stability? 'Nature has given all men the right of being happy,' but the old lawgivers abandoned nature's wise economy, by which she uses the desires and interests of individuals to fulfil her general plans and ensure the common weal. Men like Tyeburgs destroyed all idea of property, violated the laws of modesty, and annihilated the tenderest ties of blood. A false and mischievous spirit of system seduced them away from the true method, the feeling after experience.<sup>1</sup> A

<sup>1</sup> *Les hommes en tout ne s'éclairent que par le tâtonnement de l'expérience.* 1<sup>re</sup> 599.

general injustice reigned in the laws of all nations; among all of them what was called the public good was confined to a small number of men. Love of country was less the love of fellow-citizens than a common hatred towards strangers. Hence the barbarities practised by the ancients upon their slaves, hence that custom of slavery once spread over the whole earth, those horrible cruelties in the wars of the Greeks and the Romans, that barbarous inequality between the two sexes which still reigns in the East; hence the tyranny of the great towards the common people in hereditary aristocracies, the profound degradation of subject peoples. In short, everywhere the stronger have made the laws and have crushed the weak; and if they have sometimes consulted the interests of a given society, they have always forgotten those of the human race. To recall right and justice, a principle was necessary that could raise men above themselves and all around them, that could lead them to survey all nations and all conditions with an equitable gaze, and in some sort with the eyes of God himself. This is what religion has done. What other principle could have fought and vanquished both interests and prejudice united?

Nothing but the Christian religion could have worked that general revolution in men's minds, which brought the rights of humanity out into full day, and reconciled an affectionate preference for the community of which one makes a part, with a general love for mankind. Even the horrors of war were softened,

and humanity began to be spared such frightful sequels of triumph, as towns burnt to ashes, populations put to the sword, the wounded massacred in cold blood, or reserved to give a ghastly decoration to triumph. Slavery, where it was not abolished, was constantly and effectively mitigated by Christian sentiment, and the fact that the Church did not peremptorily insist on its universal abolition was due to a wise reluctance to expose the constitution of society to so sudden and violent a shock. Christianity without formal precepts, merely by inspiring a love of justice and mercy in men's hearts, prevented the laws from becoming an instrument of oppression, and held a balance between the strong and the feeble.

If the history of the ancient republics shows that they hardly knew the difference between liberty and anarchy, and if even the profound Aristotle seemed unable to reconcile monarchy with a mild government, is not the reason to be found in the fact that before the Christian era, the various governments of the world only presented either an ambition without bound or limit, or else a blind passion for independence? a perpetual balance between oppression on the one side, and revolt on the other? In vain did lawgivers attempt to arrest this incessant struggle of conflicting passions by laws which were too weak for the purpose, because they were in too imperfect an accord with opinions and manners. Religion, by placing man under the eyes of an all-seeing God, imposed on human passions the only rein capable of effectually

bridling them. It gave men internal laws, that were stronger than all the external bonds of the civil laws. By means of this internal change, it has everywhere had the effect of weakening despotism, so that the limits of Christianity seem to mark also the limits of mild government and public felicity. Kings saw the supreme tribunal of a God who should judge them and the cause of their people. Thus the distance between them and their subjects became as nothing in the infinite distance between kings and subjects alike, and the divinity that was equally elevated above either. They were both in some sort equalised by a common abasement. 'Ye nations, be subject to authority,' cried the voice of religion to the one; and to the other it cried, 'Ye kings, who judge the earth, learn that God has only entrusted you with the image of power for the happiness of your peoples.'

An eloquent description of the efficacy of Christianity in raising human nature, and impressing on kings the obligation of pursuing above all things the wellbeing of their subjects, closes with a courtly official salutation of the virtues of that Very Christian King, Lewis the Fifteenth.

'It is ill reasoning against religion,' an illustrious contemporary of Turgot's had said, in a deprecatory sentence that serves to mark the spirit of the time; 'to compile a long list of the evils which it has inflicted, without doing the same for the blessings which it has

bestowed.<sup>1</sup> Conversely we may well think it unphilosophical and unconvincing to enumerate all the blessings without any of the evils; to tell us how the Christian doctrine enlarged the human spirit, without observing what narrowing limitations it imposed; to dwell on all the mitigating influences with which the Christian churches have been associated, while forgetting all the ferocities which they have inspired. The history of European belief offers a double record since the decay of polytheism, and if for a certain number of centuries this record shows the civilisation of men's instincts by Christianity, it reveals to us in the centuries subsequent, the reverse process of the civilisation of Christianity by men's instincts. Turgot's piece treats half the subject as if it were the whole. It extends down to the middle of the eighteenth century a number of propositions and implied inferences, which are only true up to the beginning of the nineteenth.

Even within this limitation there are many questions that no student of Turgot's capacity would now overlook, yet of which he and the most reasonable spirits of his age took no cognisance. The men of either side in the eighteenth century knew what the history of opinion meant. All alike concerned themselves with its truth or falsehood, with what they counted to be its abstract fitness or unfitness. A perfect method places a man where he can command one point of view as well as the other, and can dis-

<sup>1</sup> *Esprit des Loix*, bk. xxiv. ch. ii.



cern not only how far an idea is true and convenient, but also how, whether true and convenient or otherwise, it came into its place in men's minds. We ought to be able to separate in thought the question of the grounds and evidence for a given dogma being true, from the distinct and purely historic question of the social and intellectual conditions which made men accept it for true.

Where, however, there was any question of the two religions whose document and standards are professedly drawn from the Bible, there the Frenchmen of that time assumed not a historic attitude, but one exclusively dogmatic. Everybody was so anxious to prove, that he had neither freedom nor humour to observe. The controversy as to the exact measure of the supernatural force in Judaism and its Christian development was so overwhelmingly absorbing, as to leave without light or explanation the wide and independent region of their place as simply natural forces. It may be said, and perhaps it is true, that people never allow the latter side of the inquiry to become prominent in their minds until they have settled the former, and settled it in one way: they must be indifferent to the details of the natural operations of a religion, until they are convinced that there are none of any other kind. Be this as it may, we have to record the facts. And it is difficult to imagine a Frenchman of the era of the Encyclopædia asking himself the sort of questions which now present themselves to the student in such abundance. For

instance, has one effect of Christianity been to exalt a regard for the Sympathetic over the *Æsthetic* side of action and character? And if so, to what elements in the forms of Christian teaching and practice is this due? And is such a transfer of the highest place from the beauty to the loveliness of conduct to be accounted a gain, when contrasted with the relative position of the two sides among the Greeks and Romans?

Again, we have to draw a distinction between the Christian idea and the outward Christian organisation, and between the consequences to human nature and society which flowed from the first, and the advantages which may be traced to the second. There was on the one hand a doctrine, stirring dormant spiritual instincts, and satisfying active spiritual needs; on the other an external institution, preserving, interpreting, developing, and applying the doctrine. Each of the two has its own origin, its own history, its own destiny in the memories of the race. We may attempt to estimate the functions of the one, without pronouncing on the exact value of the other. If the idea was the direct gift of heaven, the policy was due to the sagacity and mother-wit of the great ecclesiastical statesmen. If the doctrine was a supernatural boon, at least the forms in which it came gradually to overspread Europe were to be explained on rational and natural grounds. And if historical investigation of these forms and their influences should prove that they are the recognisable roots of most of the benign growths which are vaguely

styled results of Christianity, then such a conclusion would seriously attenuate the merits of the supernatural Christian doctrine in favour of the human Christian policy.

If there had been in the Christian idea the mysterious self-sowing quality so constantly claimed for it, how came it that in the Eastern part of the Empire it was as powerless for spiritual or moral regeneration as it was for political health and vitality, while in the Western part it became the organ of the most important of all the past transformations of the civilised world? Is not the difference to be explained by the difference in the surrounding medium, and what is the effect of such an explanation upon the supernatural claims of the Christian idea? Does such an explanation reduce that idea to the rank of one of the historic forces, which arise and operate and expand themselves in accordance with strictly natural conditions? The Christianity of the East was probably as degraded a form of belief, as lowering for human character, and as mischievous to social wellbeing, as has ever been held by civilised peoples. Yet the East, strangely enough, was the great home and nursery of all that is most distinctive in the constituent ideas of the Christian faith. Why, in meditating on Christianity, are we to shut our eyes to the depravation that overtook it when placed amid unfavourable social conditions, and to confine our gaze to the brighter qualities which it developed in the healthier atmosphere of the West?

Further, Turgot might have asked with much profit of the cause of historic truth, and perhaps in more emancipated years he did ask, whether economic circumstances have not had more to do with the dissolution of slavery than Christian doctrines:—whether the rise of rent from free tenants over the profits to be drawn from slave-labour by the landowner, has not been a more powerful stimulant to emancipation, than the moral maxim that we ought to love one another, or the Christian proposition that we are all equals before the divine throne and co-heirs of salvation:—whether a steady and permanent fall in the price of slave-raised productions had not as much to do with the decay of slavery in Europe, as the love of God or the doctrine of human brotherhood.<sup>1</sup> That the influence of Christianity, so far as it went, and, so far as it was a real power, tended both to abolish slavery, and, where it was too feeble to press in this direction, at any rate tended to mitigate the harshness of its usages, is hardly to be denied by any fair-minded person. The true issue is what this influence amounted to. The orthodox historian treats it as single and omnipotent. His heterodox brother—in the eighteenth century they both usually belonged to one family—leaves it out.

The crowded annals of human misology, as well as the more terrible chronicle of the consequences when misology has impatiently betaken itself to the cruel

<sup>1</sup> See on this subject Finlay's *Medieval Greece and Trebizond*, 197; and also, on the other hand, p. 56.



in Europe, of which our own age, four generations later, is watching a very decisive, if not a final stage. Turgot's demonstration of the beneficence of Christianity was delivered in July 1750—almost the exact middle of the eighteenth century. The death of the Emperor Charles the Sixth, ten years before, had given the signal for the break-up of the European system. The iron army of Prussia made its first stride out of the narrow northern borders, into the broad arena of the West, and every new illustration of the fortitude and depth and far-reaching power of Prussia has been a new blow to the old Catholic organisation. The first act of this prodigious drama closed while Turgot was a pupil at the Sorbonne. The court of France had blundered into alliances against the retrograde and Catholic house of Austria, while England, with equal blindness, had stumbled into friendship with it. Before the opening of the second act or true climax—that is, before the Seven Years' War began—interests and forces became more naturally adjusted. France, Spain, and Austria, Bourbons and Hapsburgs, the great pillars of the Church, were ranged against England and Prussia, the half-conscious representatives of those industrial and individualist principles which replaced, whether for a time or permanently, the decaying system of aristocratic caste in temporal things, and an ungrowing Catholicism in things spiritual. In 1750 ecclesiastical far-sightedness, court intrigue, and family ambitions, were actively preparing the way for the Austrian alliance in the

mephitic air of Versailles. The issue at stake was the maintenance of the supremacy of the Church, and the ancient Christian organisation of France and of Europe.

We now know how this long battle has gone. The Jesuit Churchmen lost their lead, and were thrown back out of the civil and political sphere. We know, too, what effect these blows to the Catholic organisation have had upon the activity of the Catholic idea. With the decline and extermination of the predominance of Churchmen in civil affairs, there began a tendency, which has since become deeper and stronger, in the Church to withdraw herself and her sons from a sphere where she could no longer be sovereign and queen. Religion, since the Revolution, isolates the most devout Catholics from political action and political interests. This great change, however, this return of the leaders of the Christian society upon the original conceptions of the Christian faith, did not come to pass in Turgot's time. He watched the struggle of the Church for the maintenance of its temporal privilege and honour, and for the continued protection by secular power of its spiritual supremacy. The outcome of the struggle was later.

We may say, in fine, that if this first public composition of Turgot's is extremely imperfect, it was better to exaggerate the services of Christianity, alike as an internal faith and as a peculiar form of social organisation, than to describe Gregory the Great and Innocent, Hildebrand and Bernard, as artful and

ulgar tyrants, and Aquinas and Roger Bacon as the products of a purely barbarous, stationary, and dark age. There is at first sight something surprising in the respect which Turgot's ablest contemporaries paid to the contributions made to progress by Greece and Rome, compared with their angry disparagement of the dark ages. The reason of this contrast we soon discover to be that the passions of present contests give their own colour to men's interpretation of the circumstances of the remote middle time, between the Roman Empire and the commencement of the revolutionary period. Turgot escaped these passions more completely than any man of his time who was noble enough to be endowed with the capacity for passion. He never forgot that it is as wise and just to confess the obligations of mankind to the Catholic monotheism of the West, as it is shallow and unjust in professors of Christianity to despise or hate the lower theological systems which guide the humbler families of mankind.

Let us observe that only three years after this academic discourse in praise of the religion of the time, Turgot was declaring that 'the greatest of the services of Christianity to the world was that it had both enlightened and propagated *natural religion*.'<sup>1</sup>

### III.

Turgot's inquiry into the extent and quality of the debt of European civilisation to Christianity was

<sup>1</sup> *Lettres sur la Tolérance*, II. vol. ii. 687.



marked by a certain breadth and largeness, in spite of the bonds of circumstance and subject—for who, after all, can consider Christianity to any purpose, apart from other conditions of general progress, or without free comparison with other dogmatic systems! It is not surprising, then, to find the same valuable gifts of vision coming into play with a thousand times greater liberty and power, when the theme was widened so as to comprehend the successive steps of the advancement of the human mind in all its aspects. The Second and more famous of the two Discourses at the Sorbonne was read in December 1750, and professes to treat the Successive Advances of the Human Mind.<sup>1</sup> The opening lines are among the most pregnant, as they were among the most original, in the history of literature, and reveal in an outline, standing clear against the light, a thought which revolutionised old methods of viewing and describing the course of human affairs, and contained the germs of a new and most fruitful philosophy of society.

‘The phenomena of nature, subjected as they are to constant laws, are enclosed in a circle of revolutions that remain the same for ever. All comes to life again, all perishes again; and in those successive generations, by which vegetables and animals reproduce themselves, time does no more than bring back at each moment the image of what it has just dismissed.

<sup>1</sup> Sur les progrès successifs de l'esprit humain. *Œuvres*, II. 597-611.

The succession of men, on the contrary, offers from age to age a spectacle of continual variations. Reason, freedom, the passions, are incessantly producing new events. *All epochs are fastened together by a sequence of causes and effects, linking the condition of the world to all the conditions that have gone before it.* The gradually multiplied signs of speech and writing, giving men an instrument for making sure of the continued possession of their ideas, as well as of imparting them to others, have formed out of the knowledge of each individual a common treasure, which generation transmits to generation, as an inheritance constantly augmented by the discoveries of each age; and the human race, observed from its first beginning, seems in the eyes of the philosopher to be one vast whole, which, like each individual in it, has its infancy and its growth.'

This was not a mere casual reflection in Turgot's mind, taking a solitary and separate position among those various and unordered ideas, which spring up and go on existing without visible fruit in every active intelligence. It was one of the systematic conceptions which shape and rule many groups of facts, fixing a new and high place of their own for them among the great divisions of knowledge. In a word, it belonged to the rare order of truly creative ideas, and was the root or germ of a whole body of vigorous and connected thought. This quality marks the distinction, in respect of the treatment of history, between Turgot, and both Bossuet and the great

writers of history in France and England in the eighteenth century. Many of the sayings to which we are referred for the origin of the modern idea of history, such as Pascal's for instance, are the fortuitous glimpses of men of genius into a vast sea, whose extent they have not been led to suspect, and which only make a passing and momentary mark. Bossuet's talk of universal history, which has been so constantly praised, was fundamentally, and in substance, no more than a bit of theological commonplace splendidly decorated. He did indeed speak of 'the concatenation of human affairs,' but only in the same sentence with 'the sequence of the counsels of God.' The gorgeous rhetorician of the Church was not likely to rise philosophically into the larger air of universal history, properly so called. His famous Discourse is a vindication of divine foresight, by means of an intensely narrow survey of such sets of facts as might be thought not inconsistent with the deity's fixed purpose to make one final and decisive revelation to men. No one who looks upon the vast assemblage of stupendous human circumstances, from the first origin of man upon the earth, as merely the ordained antecedent of what, seen from the long procession of all the ages, figures in so diminutive a consummation as the Catholic Church, is likely to obtain a very effective hold of that broad sequence and many-linked chain of events, to which Bossuet gave a right name, but whose real meaning he never was even near seizing. His merit is that he did in a small and rhetorical way

what Montesquieu and Voltaire afterwards did in a truly comprehensive and philosophical way; he pressed forward general ideas in connection with the recorded movements of the chief races of mankind. For a teacher of history to leave the bare chronicler's road so far as to declare, for example, the general principle, inadequate and over-stated as it is, that 'religion and civil government are the two points on which human things revolve,'—even this was a clear step in advance. The dismissal of the long series of emperors from Augustus to Alexander Severus in two or three pages was to show a ripe sense of large historic proportion. Again, Bossuet's expressions of 'the concatenation of the universe,' of the interdependence of the parts of so vast a whole, of there coming no great change without having its causes in foregoing centuries, and of the true object of history being to observe, in connection with each epoch, those secret dispositions of events which prepared the way for great changes, as well as the momentous conjunctures which more immediately brought them to pass<sup>1</sup>—all these phrases seem to point to a true and philosophic survey. But they end in themselves, and lead nowhither. The chain is an arbitrary and one-sided collection of facts. The writer does not cautiously follow and feel after the successive links, but forges and chooses and arrays them after a pattern of his own, which was fixed independently of them. A scientific term or two is not enough

<sup>1</sup> *Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle*, part iii. ch. ii.

to disguise the purely theological essence of the treatise.

Montesquieu and Voltaire were both far enough removed from Bossuet's point of view, and the *Spirit of Laws* of the one, and the *Essay on the Manners and Character of Nations* of the other, mark a very different way of considering history from the lofty and confident method of the orthodox rhetorician. The *Spirit of Laws* was published in 1748, that is to say a couple of years before Turgot's Discourse at the Sorbonne; Voltaire's *Essay on Manners* did not come out until 1757, or seven years later than the Discourse; but Voltaire himself has told us that its composition dates from 1740, when he prepared this new presentation of European history for the service of Madame du Châtelet.<sup>1</sup> We may hence fairly consider the cardinal work of Montesquieu, and the cardinal historical work of Voltaire, as virtually belonging to the same time. And they possess a leading character in common, which separates them both from Turgot, and places them relatively to his idea in a secondary rank. In a word, Montesquieu and Voltaire, if we have to search their most distinctive quality, introduced into history systematically, and with full and decisive effect, a broad generality of treatment. They grouped the facts of history; and they did not group them locally or in accordance with mere geographical or chronological division, but collected the facts in social classes and orders from many countries and times. Their

<sup>1</sup> Preface to *Essai sur les Mœurs*. Œuv. xx.

work was a work of classification. It showed the possibility of arranging the manifold and complex facts of society, and of the movements of communities, under heads and with reference to definite general conditions.

There is no need here to enter into any criticism of Montesquieu's great work, how far the merits of its execution equalled the merit of its design, how far his vicious confusion of the senses of the word 'law' impaired the worth of his book, as a contribution to inductive or comparative history. We have only to seek the difference between the philosophic conception of Montesquieu and the philosophic conception of Turgot. The latter may be considered a more liberal completion of the former. Turgot not only sees the operation of law in the movements and institutions of society, but he interprets this law in a positive and scientific sense, as an ascertainable succession of social states, each of them being the cause and effect of other social states. Turgot gives its deserved prominence to the fertile idea of there being an ordered movement of growth or advance among societies; in other words, of the civilisation of any given portion of mankind having fixed conditions analogous to those of a physical organism. Finally, he does not limit his thought by fixing it upon the laws and constitutions only of countries, but refers historical philosophy to its veritable and widest object and concern, the steps and conditions of the progression of the human mind.

How, he inquires, can we seize the thread of the progress of the human mind? How trace the road, now overgrown and half-hidden, along which the race has travelled? Two ideas suggest themselves, which lay foundations for this inquiry. For one thing, the resources of nature and the fruitful germ of all sorts of knowledge are to be found wherever men are to be found. 'The sublimest attainments are not, and cannot be, other than the first ideas of sense developed or combined, just as the edifice whose height most amazes the eye, of necessity reposes on the very earth that we tread; and the same senses, the same organs, the spectacle of the same universe, have everywhere given men the same ideas, as the same needs and the same dispositions have everywhere taught them the same arts.' Or it might be put in other words. There is identity in human nature, and repetition in surrounding circumstance means the reproduction of social consequences. For another thing, 'the actual state of the universe, by presenting at the same moment on the earth all the shades of barbarism and civilisation, discloses to us as in a single glance the monuments, the footprints of all the steps of the human mind, the measure of the whole track along which it has passed, the history of all the ages.'

The progress of the human mind means to Turgot the progress of knowledge. Its history is the history of the growth and spread of science and the arts. Its advance is increased enlightenment of the understanding. From Adam and Eve down to Lewis the

Fourteenth, the record of progress is the chronicle of the ever-increasing additions to the sum of what men know, and the accuracy and fulness with which they know. The chief instrument in this enlightenment is the rising up from time to time of some lofty and superior intelligence ; for though human character contains everywhere the same principle, yet certain minds are endowed with a peculiar abundance of talent that is refused to others. 'Circumstances develop these superior talents, or leave them buried in obscurity ; and from the infinite variety of these circumstances springs the inequality among nations.' The agricultural stage goes immediately before a decisively polished state, because it is then first that there is that surplus of means of subsistence, which allows men of higher capacity the leisure for using it in the acquisition of knowledge, properly so called.

One of the greatest steps was the precious invention of writing, and one of the most rapid was the constitution of mathematical knowledge. The sciences that came next matured more slowly, because in mathematics the explorer has only to compare ideas among one another, while in the others he has to test the conformity of ideas to objective facts. Mathematical truths, becoming more numerous every day, and increasingly fruitful in proportion, lead to the development of hypotheses at once more extensive and more exact, and point to new experiments, which in their turn furnish new problems to solve. 'So neces-



sity perfects the instrument ; so mathematic support in physics, to which it lends its lamp knowledge is bound together ; so, notwithstanding the diversity of their advance, all the sciences one another mutual aid ; and so, by force of a way, of multiplying systems, of exhausting so to speak, the world at length arrives at the ledge of a vast number of truths.' It might be if a prodigious confusion, as of tongues, would from so enormous an advance along so many 'The different sciences, originally confined to few simple notions common to all, can now their advance into more extensive and difficult only be surveyed apart. But an advance, & still, brings them together again, because that interdependence of all truths is discovered, which, it links them one to another, throws light on by another.'

Alas, the history of opinion is, in one of its extensive branches, the history of error. There are the single source of our ideas, and furnish models to the imagination. Hence that nearly rigid disposition to judge what we are ignorant by what we know ; hence those deceptive analogies to which the primitive rudeness of men surrenders itself. *'As they watched nature, as their eyes went to the surface of a profound ocean, instead of the bed hidden under the waters, they saw nothing but their own likeness. Every object in nature had its and this god formed after the pattern of men,*

men's attributes and men's vices.'<sup>1</sup> Here, in anthropomorphism, or the transfer of human quality to things not human, and the invention of spiritual existences to be the recipients of this quality, Turgot justly touched the root of most of the wrong thinking that has been as a manacle to science.

His admiration for those epochs in which new truths were most successfully discovered, and old fallacies most signally routed, did not prevent Turgot from appreciating the ages of criticism and their services to knowledge. He does full justice to Alexandria, not only for its astronomy and geometry, but for that peculiar studiousness 'which exercises itself less on things than on books; whose strength lies less in producing and discovering, than in collecting and comparing and estimating what has been produced and discovered; which does not press forward, but gazes backward along the road that has already been traversed. The studies that require most genius, are not always those which imply most progress in the mass of men. There are minds to which nature has given a memory capable of comparing truths, of suggesting an arrangement that places these truths in the fullest light; but to which, at the same time, she has refused that ardour of genius which insists on inventing and opening out for itself new lines of discovery. Made to unite former discoveries under a single point of view, to surround them with

<sup>1</sup> P. 601.

light, and to exhibit them in entire perfection, if they are not luminaries that burn and sparkle of themselves, at least they are like diamonds that reflect with dazzling brilliance a borrowed light.'

Thus Turgot's conception of progress regards it mainly, if not entirely, as a gradual dawn and diffusion of light, the spreading abroad of the rays of knowledge. He does not assert, as some moderns have crudely asserted, that morality is of the nature of a fixed quantity; still he hints something of the kind. 'Morality,' he says, speaking of Greece in the time of its early physical speculation, 'though still imperfect, still kept fewer relics of the infancy of reason. Those everspringing necessities which so incessantly recall man to society, and force him to bend to its laws, that instinct, that sentiment of what is good and right, which Providence has engraved in all hearts, and which precedes reason, all lead the thinkers of every time back to the same fundamental principles of the science of morals.'

We meet with this limitation of the idea of progress in every member of the school to which, more than to any other, Turgot belonged. 'Even in the vindication of the claims of Christianity to the gratitude of mankind, he had forbore from laying stress on any original contribution, supposed to be made by that religion to the precious stock of ethical ideas. He dwells upon the 'tender zeal for the progress of truth that the Christian religion inspired,' and recounts the various circumstances in which it

pread and promoted the social and political conditions most favourable to intellectual or scientific activity. Whatever may be the truth or the value of Christianity as a dogmatic system, there can be little doubt that its weight as a historic force is to be looked for, not so much in the encouragement it gave to science and learning, in respect of which Western Europe probably owes more to Mahometanism, as in the high and generous types of character which it inspired. A man of rare moral depth, warmth, or delicacy, may be a more important element in the advance of civilisation, than the newest and truest deduction from what Turgot calls 'the fundamental principles of the science of morals.' The leading of souls to do what is right and humane, is always more urgent than mere instruction of the intelligence as to what exactly is the right and the humane. The saint after all has his place in positive history; but the men of the eighteenth century passionately threw him out from their calendar, as the mere wooden idol of superstition. They eagerly recognised the genius of scientific discovery; but they had no eyes for the genius of moral wisdom. Turgot, far as he was from many of the narrownesses of his time, yet did not entirely transcend his, the worst of them all. And because he could not perceive there to be any new growths in moral science, he left out from a front place among the virtues that have given strength and ripeness to the human mind, the superior capacity of some men for leading, by word and example, the glowing love and

devout practice of morality in the best of all generations of their fellows.

The mechanical arts, Turgot says, were introduced in the dark ages by the necessities of civilisation, and because 'it is impossible but that out of the most ignorant and most barbarous nations practising them, there should arise from time to time one of those men of genius who are found everywhere with other men, as gold is found everywhere in the veins of a mine.' Surely in the same way, the sciences arose, with keener feeling for the spiritual necessities of the time, and finer knowledge to train and direct the capacities of human nature to meet those necessities, and make their satisfaction the basis for yet higher standards and holier aspirations and nobler and more useful practice. The work of all such men deserves a place in an outline of the progressive forces of the human mind, as much as the work of those who invented the art of exchange, the art of musical notation, the art of clocks, gunpowder, and all the other material instruments for multiplying the powers of man and the conveniences of life.

Even if we give Turgot the benefit of the doubt, whether he intended to describe more than the progress of the human intelligence, or the functioning of the mind, the omission of the whole moral side is still a defect. For as he interprets knowledge to be the conformity of our ideas to facts, has there not been a clearly recognisable progress in the improved conformity of our ideas to the most momentous facts of all, the various circumstances of human action, in

motives and consequences? No factor among the constituents of a progressive civilisation deserves more carefully to be taken into account, than the degree in which the current opinion and usage of a society recognise the comprehensiveness of moral obligation. More than upon anything else, does progress depend on the kinds of conduct which a community classifies as moral or immoral, and upon the wider or narrower inclusiveness within rigid ethical boundaries of what ought or ought not to be left open and indifferent. The conditions which create and modify these ethical regulations,—their law in a word, — form a department of the history of the human mind, which can be almost less readily dispensed with than any other. What sort of a history of Europe would that be, which should omit, for example, to consider the influence of the moral rigour of Calvinism upon the growth of the nations affected by it?

Moreover, Turgot expressly admits the ever-present wants of society to be the stimulating agents, as well as the guides, of scientific energy. He expressly admits, too, that they are constantly plucking men by the skirt, and forcing them back to social rules of conduct. It is certain, therefore, that as the necessities of society increase in number and complexity, morality will be developed to correspond with them, and the way in which new applications of ethical sentiments to the demands of the common weal are made, is as interesting and as deserving of a place in any scientific inquiry into social progress, as the new

applications of physical truths to satisfy material needs and to further material convenience. Turgot justly points to the perfecting of language as one of the most important of the many processes that go to the general advancement of the race.<sup>1</sup> Not less, but more, important is the analogous work of perfecting our ideas of virtue and duty. Surely this chamber, too, in the great laboratory deserves that the historian should unseal its door and explore its recesses.

The characteristic merits of the second of the two discourses at the Sorbonne may be briefly described in this way. It recognises the idea of ordered succession in connection with the facts of society. It considers this succession as one, not of superficial events, but of working forces. Thus Bolingbroke, writing fifteen years before, had said that 'as to events that stand recorded in history, we see them all, we see them as they followed one another, or as they produced one another, causes or effects, immediate or remote.'<sup>2</sup> But it is very evident from his illustrations that by all this he understood no more than the immediate connection between one transaction and another. His thought, for example, of the Revolution of 1688 being a consequence of the bad government of James the Second; of this bad government springing from the king's attachment to popery; this in turn being caused by the exile of the royal family; this exile having its source in Cromwell's usurpation; and so forth, one may suppose, down to the Noachian flood, or the em-

<sup>1</sup> P. 603.

<sup>2</sup> *Study of History*, Letter II.

when the earth was formless and void. It is mere futility to talk of cause and effect in connection with a string of arbitrarily chosen incidents of this sort. Cause and effect, in Turgot's sense of history, describe a relation between certain sets or groups of circumstances, that are of a peculiarly decisive kind, because the surface of events conforms itself to their inner working. His account of these deciding circumstances was not what we should be likely to accept now, because he limited them too closely to purely intellectual acquisitions, as we have just seen, and because he failed to see the necessity of tracing the root of the whole growth to certain principles in the mental constitution of mankind. But, at all events, his conception of history rose above merely individual concerns, embraced the successive movements of societies and their relations to one another, and sought the spring of revolutions in the affairs of a community in long trains of preparing conditions, internal and external. Above all, history was a whole. The fortunes and achievements of each nation were scrutinised for their effect on the growth of all mankind.

#### IV.

In the year 1761, Turgot, then in his thirty-fourth year, was appointed to the office of Intendant in the Generality of Limoges. There were three different divisions of France in the eighteenth century: first and oldest, the diocese or ecclesiastical circumscrip-



tion; second, the province or military government; and third, the Generality, or a district defined for fiscal and administrative purposes. The Intendant in the government of the last century was very much what the Prefect is in the government of our own time. Perhaps, however, we understand Turgot's position in Limousin best, by comparing it to that of the Chief Commissioner of some great district in our Indian Empire. For example, the first task which Turgot had to perform was to execute a new land-assessment for purposes of imperial revenue. He had to construct roads, to build barracks, to administer justice, to deal with a famine, just as the English civilian has to do in Orissa or Behar. Much of his time was taken up in elaborate memorials to the central government, and the desk of the controller-general at Versailles was loaded with minutes and reports exactly like the voluminous papers which fill the mahogany boxes of the Members of Council and the Home Secretary at Calcutta. The fundamental conditions of the two systems of government were much alike; absolute political authority, and an elaborately centralised civil administration for keeping order and raising a revenue. The direct authority of an Intendant was not considerable. His chief functions were the settlement of detail in executing the general orders that he received from the minister; a provisional decision on certain kinds of minor affairs; and a power of judging some civil suits, subject to appeal to the Council. But though the Intendant was so strictly a

subordinate, yet he was the man of the government, and thoroughly in its confidence. The government saw with his eyes, and only acted on the faith of his reports, memorials, and requisitions; and this in a country where the government united in itself all forms of power, and was obliged to be incessantly active and to make itself felt at every point.

Of all the thirty-two great districts in which the authority of the Intendant stood between the common people and the authority of the minister at Versailles, the Generality of Limoges was the poorest, the rudest, the most backward, and the most miserable. To the eye of the traveller with a mind for the picturesque, there were parts of this central region of France whose rolling undulations, delicious water-scenes, deep glens extending into amphitheatres, and slopes hung with woods of chestnut, all seemed to make a lovelier picture than the cheerful beauty of prosperous Normandy, or the olive-groves and orange-gardens of Provence. Arthur Young thought the Limousin the most beautiful part of France. Unhappily for the cultivator, these gracious conformations belonged to a marsh and churlish soil. For him the roll of the chalk and the massing of the granite would have been well exchanged for the fat loams of level Picardy. The soil of the Limousin was declared by its inhabitants to be the most ungrateful in the whole kingdom, returning no more than four net for one of seed sown, while there was land in the vale of the Garonne that returned thirty-fold. The two conditions for raising

tolerable crops were abundance of labour and abundance of manure. But misery drove the men away and the stock were sold to pay the taxes. So the land lacked both the arms of the tiller, and the dressing whose generous chemistry would have transmuted the dull earth into fruitfulness and plenty. The extent of the district was estimated at a million and a half of hectares, equivalent to nearly four million of English acres : yet the population of this vast tract was only five hundred thousand souls. Even to-day it is not more than eight hundred thousand.

The common food of the people was the chestnut and to the great majority of them even the coarsest rye-bread was a luxury that they had never tasted. Maize and buckwheat were their chief cereals, and these, together with a coarse radish, took up hundreds of acres that might under a happier system have produced fine wheat and nourished fruit-trees. There had once been a certain export of cattle, but that had now come to an end, partly because the general decline of the district had impaired the quality of the beasts and partly because the Parisian butchers, who were by much the greatest customers, had found the markets of Normandy more convenient. The more the trade went down, the heavier was the burden of the cattle tax on the stock that remained. The stock-dealer was thus ruined from both sides at once. In the same way, the Limousin horses, whose breed had been famous all over France, had ceased to be an object of commerce, and the progressive increase of taxation

had gradually extinguished the trade. Angoumois, which formed part of the Generality of Limoges, had previously boasted of producing the best and finest paper in the world, and it had found a market not only throughout France, but all over Europe. There had been a time when this manufacture supported sixty mills; at the death of Lewis XIV. their number had fallen from sixty to sixteen. An excise duty at the mill, a duty on exportation at the provincial frontier, a duty on the importation of rags over the provincial frontier,—all these vexations had succeeded in reducing the trade with Holland, one of France's best customers, to one-fourth of its previous dimensions. Nor were paper and cattle the only branches of trade that had been blighted by fiscal perversity. The same burden arrested the transport of saffron across the borders of the province, on its way to Hungary and Prussia and the other cold lands where saffron was a favourite condiment. Salt which came up the Charente from the marshes by the coast, was stripped of all its profit, first by the duty paid on crossing from the Limousin to Périgord and Auvergne, and next by the right possessed by certain of the great lords on the banks of the Charente to help themselves at one point and another to portions of the cargo. Iron was subject to a harassing excise in all those parts of the country that were beyond the jurisdiction of the parlement of Bordeaux. The effect of such positive hindrances as these to the transit of goods was further aided, to the destruction of trade,

by the absence of roads. There were four roads in the province, but all of them so bad that the traveller knew not whether to curse more lustily the rocks or the swamps that interrupted his journey alternately. There were two rivers, the Vienne and the Vézère, and these might seem to an enthusiast for the famous argument from Design, as if Nature had intended them for the transport of timber from the immense forests that crowned the Limousin hills. Unluckily, their beds were so thickly bestrown with rock that neither of them was navigable for any considerable part of its long course through the ill-starred province.

The inhabitants were as cheerless as the land on which they lived. They had none of the fiery energy, the eloquence, the mobility of the people of the south. Still less were they endowed with the apt intelligence, the ease, the social amiability, the openness, of their neighbours on the north. 'The dwellers in Upper Limousin,' said one who knew them, 'are coarse and heavy, jealous, distrustful, avaricious.' The dwellers in Lower Limousin had a less repulsive address, but they were at least as narrowly self-interested at heart, and they added a capacity for tenacious and vindictive hatred. The Limousins had the superstitious doctrines of other semi-barbarous populations, and they had their vices. They passed abruptly and without remorse from a penitential procession to the tavern and the brothel. Their Christianity was as superficial as that of the peasant of the Eifel in our own day, or

of the Finnish converts of whom we are told that they are even now not beyond sacrificing a foal in honour of the Virgin Mary. Saint Martial and Saint Leonard were the patron saints of the country, and were the objects of an adoration in comparison with which the other saints, and even God himself, were thrust into a secondary place.

In short, the people of the Generality of Limoges represented the most unattractive type of peasantry. They were deeply superstitious, violent in their prejudices, obstinate withstanders of all novelty, rude, dull, stupid, perverse, and hardly redeeming a narrow and blinding covetousness by a stubborn and mechanical industry. Their country has been fixed upon as the cradle of Celtic nationality in France, and there are some who believe that here the old Gaulish blood kept itself purer from external admixture than was the case anywhere else in the land. In our own day, when an orator has occasion to pay a compliment to the townsmen of Limoges, he says that the genius of the people of the district has ever been faithful to its source; it has ever held the balance true between the Frank tradition of the north, and the Roman tradition of the south. This makes an excellent period for a rhetorician, but the fact which it conveys made Limousin all the severer a task for an administrator. Almost immediately after his appointment, Turgot had the chance of being removed to Rouen, and after that to Lyons. Either of these promotions would have had the advantages of a considerable

increase of income, less laborious duties, and a much more agreeable residence. Turgot, with a high sense of duty that probably seemed quixotic enough to the Controller-General, declined the preferment, on the very ground of the difficulty and importance of the task that he had already undertaken. '*Poor peasant, poor kingdom!*' had been Quesnay's constant exclamation, and it had sunk deep into the spirit of his disciple. He could have little thought of high salary or personal ease, when he discerned an opportunity of improving the hard lot of the peasant, and softening the misfortunes of the realm.

Turgot was one of the men to whom good government is a religion. It might be said to be the religion of all the best men of that century, and it was natural that it should be so. The decay of a theology that places our deepest solitudes in a sphere beyond this, is naturally accompanied by a transfer of these high solitudes to a nearer scene. But though the desire for good government, and a right sense of its cardinal importance, were common ideas of the time in all the best heads from Voltaire downwards, yet Turgot had a patience which in them was universally wanting. There are two sorts of mistaken people in the world; those who always think that something could and ought to have been done to prevent disaster, and those who always think that nothing could have been done. Turgot was very far removed indeed from the latter class, but, on the other side, he was too sagacious not to know that there are some evils of

which we do well to bear a part, as the best means of mitigating the other part. Though he respected the writings of Rousseau and confessed his obligations to them, Turgot abhorred declamation. He had no hope of clearing society of the intellectual and moral débris it ages at a stroke. Nor had he abstract standards of human bliss. The keyword to his political theory was not Pity nor Benevolence, but Justice. 'We are to go wrong,' he said once, when pressed to confer some advantage on the poor at the cost of the rich, 'the moment we forget that *justice alone can keep the balance true among all rights and all interests.*' Let us proceed to watch this principle actively applied in a field where it was grievously needed.

As everybody knows, the great fiscal grievance of old France was the *taille*, a tax raised on property and income, but only on the property and income of the unprivileged classes. In the Limousin Turgot's predecessor tried to substitute for the arbitrary *taille*, a tax systematically assessed in proportion to the amount of the person's property. Such a design involved a complete re-measurement and re-valuation of all the land of the Generality, and this was a task of immense magnitude and difficulty. It was very imperfectly performed, and Turgot found the province groaning under a mass of fiscal anomalies and disorders. Assessment, collection, exemption, were all alike conducted without definite principles or uniform system. Besides these abuses, the total sum demanded from the Generality by the royal govern-



ment was greatly in excess of the local necessities. The district was heavily overcharged, and more so than other districts around it. No deduction had been made from the sum exacted by the treasury, and the falling off in prosperity was great and rapid. Turgot computed that 'the king's share' was as large as that of the proprietors; in other words, the crown absorbed one half of the net products of the province. The government listened to these representations, and conceded to the Generality about half of the reductions that Turgot had solicited. A greater reform was the re-adjustment of the burden, thus lightening it within the province. The people were so impressed by the disorders which had been introduced by the imperfect operation of the proportional table, and with the characteristic impatience of a rude and unintelligent population, they were heedlessly crying out for a return to the more familiar, and therefore more comfortable, disorders of the arbitrary system. Turgot, as was natural, resisted this slovenly reaction, and applied himself with zealous industry to the immense and complex work of effecting a complete revision and settlement of the regulations for assessment, and, what was a more gigantic enterprise, carrying out a new survey and new valuation of land and property, to serve as a true base for the application of an equitable assessment. At the end of thirteen years of indomitable toil the work was unfinished, chiefly owing to want of money for its execution. The court wasted more in a fortnight

the easy follies of Versailles, than would have given to the Limousin the instrument of a finished scheme of fiscal order. Turgot's labour was not wholly thrown away. The worst abuses were corrected, and the most crying iniquities swept away, save that iniquity of the exemption of the privileged orders, which Turgot could not yet venture to touch.

Let us proceed to another of the master abuses of the old system. The introduction of the *Corvée*, in the sense in which we have to speak of it, dates no further back than the beginning of the eighteenth century. It was an encroachment and an innovation on the part of the bureaucracy, and the odd circumstance has been remarked that the first mention of the road *corvées* in any royal Act is the famous edict of 1776, which suppressed them. Until the Regency this famous word had described only the services owed by dependents to their lords. It meant so many days' labour on the lord's lands, and so many offices of domestic duty. When, in the early part of the century, the advantages of a good system of high-roads began to be perceived by the government, the convenient idea came into the heads of the more ingenious among the Intendants of imposing, for the construction of the roads, a royal or public *corvée* analogous to that of private feudalism. Few more mischievous imposts could have been devised.

That undying class who are contented with the shallow presumptions of *a priori* reasoning in economic matters, did, it is true, find specious pleas even for the

road *corvée*. There has never been an abuse in the history of the world, for which something good could not be said. If men earned money by labour and the use of their time, why not require from them time and labour instead of money? By the latter device, are we not assured against malversation of the funds? Those who substitute words for things, and verbal plausibilities for the observation of experience, could prolong these arguments indefinitely. The evils of the road *corvée* meanwhile remained patent and indisputable. In England at the same period, it is true, the country people were obliged to give six days in the year to the repair of the highways, under the management of the justices of the peace. And in England the business was performed without oppression. But then this only illustrates the unwisdom of arguing about economic arrangements in the abstract. All depends on the conditions by which the given arrangement is surrounded, and a practice that in England was merely clumsy, was in France not only clumsy but a gross cruelty. There the burden united almost all the follies and iniquities with which a public service could be loaded. The French peasant had to give, not six, but twelve or fifteen days of labour every year for the construction and repair of the roads of his neighbourhood. If he had a horse and cart, they too were pressed into the service. He could not choose the time, and he was constantly carried away at the moment when his own poor harvest needed his right arm and his supervision. He received no pay.

and his days on the roads were days of hunger to himself and his family. He had the bitterness of knowing that the advantage of the high-road was light, indirect, and sometimes null to himself, while it was direct and great to the town merchants and the country gentlemen, who contributed not an hour nor a sou to the work. It was exactly the most indigent upon whose backs this slavish load was placed. There were a hundred abuses of spite or partiality, of favouritism or vengeance, in the allotment of the work. The wretch was sent to the part of the road most distant from his own house ; or he was forced to work for a longer time than fell fairly to his share ; or he saw a neighbour allowed to escape on payment of a sum of money. And at the end of all the roads were rills. The labourers, having little heart in work for which they had no wage, and weakened by want of food, did badly what they had to do. There was no scientific superintendence, no skilled direction, no system in the construction, no watchfulness as to the maintenance. The rains of winter and the storms of summer did damage that one man could have repaired by careful industry from day to day, and that for lack of this one man went on increasing, until the road fell into holes, the ditches got filled up, and deep pools of water stood permanently in the middle of the highway. The rich disdained to put a hand to the work ; the poor, aware that they would be forced to the hated task in the following autumn or spring, naturally attended to their own fields, and left the roads to fall to ruin.

It need not be said that this barbarous slovenliness and disorder meant an incredible waste of resources. It was calculated that a contractor would have provided and maintained fine roads for little more than one-third of the cost at which the *corvée* furnished roads that were execrable. Condorcet was right in comparing the government in this matter to a senseless fellow, who indulges in all the more lavish riot, because by paying for nothing, and getting everything at a higher price on credit, he is never frightened into sense by being confronted with a budget of his prodigalities.

It takes fewer words to describe Turgot's way of dealing with this oriental mixture of extravagance, injustice, and squalor. The Intendant of Caen had already proposed to the inhabitants of that district the alternative plan of commuting the *corvée* into a money payment. Turgot adopted and perfected this great transformation. He substituted for personal service on the roads a yearly rate, proportional in amount to the *taille*. He instituted a systematic survey and direction of the roads, existing or required in the Generality, and he committed the execution of the approved plans to contractors on exact and business-like principles. The result of this change was not merely an immense relief to the unfortunate men who had been every year harassed to death and half-ruined by the old method of forced labour, but so remarkable an improvement both in the goodness and extension of the roads, that when Arthur Young

rent over them five and twenty years afterwards, he pronounced them by far the noblest public ways to be found anywhere in France.

Two very instructive facts may be mentioned in connection with the suppression of the *corvées* in the *imousin*. The first is that the central government assented to the changes proposed by the young *Intendant*, as promptly as if it had been a committee of the Convention, instead of being the nominee of an absolute king. The other is that the people in the country, when Turgot had his plans laid before them in their parish meetings held after mass on Sundays, listened with the keenest distrust and suspicion to what they insisted on regarding as a sinister design for exacting more money from them. Well might Condorcet say that very often it needs little courage to do men harm, for they constantly suffer from tranquilly enough; but when you take it into your head to do them some service, then they revolt and accuse you of being an innovator. It is fair, however, to remember how many good grounds the French countryman had for distrusting the professions of any agent of the government. For even in the case of this very reform, though Turgot was able to make an addition to the *taille* in commutation of work on the roads, he was not able to force a contribution, either to the *taille* or any other impost, from the privileged classes, the very persons who were best able to pay. This is only an illustration of what is now a well-known fact, that revolution

was made necessary less by despotism than by privilege on the one side, and by intense political distrust on the other side.

Turgot was thoroughly awake to the necessity of penetrating public opinion. The first principle of the school of Economists was an 'enlightened people.' Nothing was to be done by them; everything was to be done for them. But they were to be trained to understand the grounds of the measures which a central authority conceived, shaped, and carried into practice. Rousseau was the only writer of the revolutionary school who had the modern democratic faith in the virtue and wisdom of the common people. Voltaire habitually spoke of their bigotry and prejudice with the natural bitterness of a cultivated man towards the incurable vices of ignorance. The Economists admitted Voltaire's view as true of an existing state of things, but they looked to education, meaning by that something more than primary instruction, to lead gradually to the development of sound political intelligence. Hence when Turgot came into full power as the minister of Lewis XVI., twelve years after he first went to his obscure duties in the Limousin, he introduced the method of prefacing his edicts by an elaborate statement of the reasons on which their policy rested. And on the same principle he now adopted the only means at his disposal for instructing and directing opinion. The book-press was at that moment doing tremendous work among the classes with education and leisure.

But the newspaper press hardly existed, and even if it had existed, however many official journals Turgot might have had under his inspiration, the people whose minds he wished to affect were unable to read. There was only one way of reaching them, and that was through the priests. Religious life among the Limousins was, as we have seen, not very pure, but it is a significant law of human nature that the less pure a religion is, the more important in it is the place of the priest and his office. Turgot pressed the curés into friendly service. It is a remarkable fact, not without a parallel in other parts of modern history, that of the two great conservative corporations of society, the lawyers did all they could to thwart his projects, and the priests did all they could to advance them. In truth the priests are usually more or less sympathetic towards any form of centralised authority; it is only when the people take their own government into their own hands that the clergy are sure to turn cold or antipathetic towards improvement. There is one other reservation, as Turgot found out in 1775, when he had been transferred to a greater post, and the clergy had joined his bitterest enemies. Then he touched the corporate spirit, and perceived that for authority to lay a hand on ecclesiastical privilege is to metamorphose goodwill into the most rancorous malignity. Meanwhile, the letters in which Turgot explained his views and wishes to the curés, by them to be imparted to their parishes, are masterpieces of the care, the patience, the interest,



of a good ruler. Those impetuous and peremptory spirits who see in Frederick or Napoleon the only born rulers of men, might find in these letters, and in the acts to which they refer, the memorials of a far more admirable and beneficent type.

The *corvée*, vexatious as it was, yet excited less violent heats and inflicted less misery than the abuses of military service. There had been a militia in the country as far back as the time of the Merovingians, but the militia-service with which Turgot had to deal only dated from 1726. Each parish was bound to supply its quota of men to this service, and the obligation was perhaps the most odious grievance, though not the most really mischievous, of all that then afflicted the realm. The hatred which it raised was due to no failure of the military spirit in the people. From Frederick the Great downwards, everybody was well aware that the disasters to France which had begun with the shameful defeat of Rossbach and ended with the loss of Canada in the west and the Indies in the east (1757-1763), were due to no want of valour in the common soldier. It was the generals, as Napoleon said fifty years afterwards, who were incapable and inept. And it was the ineptitude of the administrative chiefs that made the militia at once ineffective and abhorred. First, they allowed a great number of classified exemptions from the ballot. The noble, the tinselled clerk, the counsellor, the domestic of noble, tinselled clerk, and counsellor, the

Idest son of the lawyer and the farmer, the tax collector, the schoolmaster, were all exempt. Hence the curse of service was embittered by a sense of injustice. This was one of the many springs in the old régime that fed the swelling and vehement stream of passion for social equality, until at length when the day came, it made such short and furious work with the structure of envious partition between citizen and citizen.

Again, by a curious perversity of official pedantry, the government insisted on each man who drew the black ticket in the abhorred lottery, performing his service in person. It forbade substitution. Under a modern system of universal military service, this is perfectly intelligible and just. But, as we have seen, military service was only made obligatory on those who were already ground down by hardships. As a consequence of this prohibition, those who were liable to be drawn lived in despair, and as no worse thing than the black ticket could possibly befall them, they had every inducement to run away from their own homes and villages. At the approach of the commissary of the government, they fled into the woods and marshes, as if they had been pursued by the plague. This was a signal for a civil war on a small scale. Those who were left behind, and whose chance of being drawn was thus increased, hastened to pursue the fugitives with such weapons as came to their hands. In the Limousin the country was constantly the scene of murderous disorders of this kind. What

was worse, was not only that the land was infested by vagabonds and bad characters, but that villages became half depopulated, and the soil lost its cultivators. Finally, as is uniformly the case in the history of bad government, an unjust method produced a worthless machine. The *milice* supplied as bad troops as the *corvée* supplied bad roads. The force was recruited from the lowest class of the population, and as soon as its members had learned a little drill, they were discharged and their places taken by raw batches provided at random by blind lot.

Turgot proposed that a character both of permanence and locality should be given to the provincial force; that each parish or union of parishes should be required to raise a number of men; that those men should be left at home and in their own districts, and only called out for exercise for a certain time each year; and that they should be retained as a reserve force by a small payment. In this way, he argued that the government would secure a competent force, and by stimulating local pride and point of honour would make service popular instead of hateful. As the government was too weak and distracted to take up so important a scheme as this, Turgot was obliged to content himself with evading the existing regulations; and it is a curious illustration of the pliancy of Versailles, that he should have been allowed to do so openly and without official remonstrance. He permitted the victim of the ballot to provide a voluntary substitute, and he permitted the parish to tempt

substitutes by payment of a sum of money on enrolment. This may seem a very obvious course to follow; but no one who has tried to realise the strength and obstinacy of routine, will measure the service of a reformer by the originality of his ideas. In affairs of government, the priceless qualities are not merely originality of resource, but a sense for things that are going wrong, and a sufficiently vigorous will to set them right.

One general expression serves to describe this most important group of Turgot's undertakings. The reader has probably already observed that what Turgot was doing, was to take that step which is one of the most decisive in the advance of a society to a highly organised industrial stage. He displaced imposts in kind, that rudest and most wasteful form of contribution to the public service, and established in their stead a system of money payments, and of having the work of the government done on commercial principles. Thus, as if it were not enough to tear the peasant away from the soil to serve in the militia, as if it were not enough to drag away the farmer and his cattle to the public high-ways, the reigning system struck a third blow at agriculture by requiring the people of the localities that happened to be traversed by a regiment on the march, to supply their waggons and horses and oxen for the purposes of military transport. In this case, it is true, a certain compensation in money was allowed, but how inadequate was this insignificant

allowance, we may easily understand. The payment was only for one day, but the day's march was often of many miles, and the oxen, which in the Limousin mostly did the work of horses, were constantly seen to drop down dead in the roads. There was not only the one day's work. Often two, three, or five days were needed to reach the place of appointment, and for these days not even the paltry twenty sous were granted. Nor could any payment of this kind recompense the peasant for the absence of his beasts of burden on the great days when he wanted to plough his fields, to carry the grain to the barns, or to take his produce to market. The obvious remedy here, as in the *corvées* was to have the transport effected by a contractor, and to pay him out of a rate levied on the persons liable. This was what Turgot ordered to be done.

Of one other burden of the same species he relieved the cultivator. This unfortunate being was liable to be called upon to collect, as well as to pay, the taxes. Once nominated, he became responsible for the amount at which his commune was assessed. If he did not produce the sum, he lost his liberty. If he advanced it from his own pocket, he lost at least the interest on the money. In collecting the money from his fellow taxpayers, he not only incurred bitter and incessant animosities, but, what was harder to bear, he lost the priceless time of which his own land was only too sorely in need. In the Limousin the luckless creature had a special disadvantage, for here the collector of

the *taille* had also to collect the twentieths, and the twentieths were a tax for which even the privileged classes were liable. They, as might be supposed, cavilled, disputed, and appealed. The appeal lay to a sort of county board, which was composed of people of their own kind, and before which they too easily made out a plausible case against a clumsy collector, who more often than not knew neither how to read nor to write. Turgot's reform of a system which was always harassing and often ruinous to an innocent individual, consisted in the creation of the task of collection into a distinct and permanent office, exercised over districts sufficiently large to make the roundage, out of which the collectors were paid, an inducement to persons of intelligence and spirit to undertake the office as a profession. However moderate and easy each of these reforms may seem by itself, yet any one may see how the sum of them added to the prosperity of the land, increased the efficiency of the public service, and tended to lessen the grinding sense of injustice among the common people.

Apart from these, the greatest and most difficult of all Turgot's administrative reforms, we may notice in passing his assiduity in watching for the smaller opportunities of making life easier to the people of his province. His private benevolence was incessant and marked. One case of its exercise carries our minds at a word into the very midst of the storm of fire which purified France of the evil and sordid elements, that now and for his life lay like a mountain

of lead on all Turgot's aims and efforts. A certain foreign contractor at Limoges was ruined by the famine of 1770. He had a clever son, whom Turgot charitably sent to school, and afterwards to college in Paris. The youth grew up to be the most eloquent and dazzling of the Girondins, the high-souled Vergniaud. It was not, however, in good works of merely private destination that Turgot mostly exercised himself. In 1767 the district was infested by wolves. The Intendant imposed a small tax for the purpose of providing rewards for the destruction of these tormentors, and in reading the minutes on the subject we are reminded of the fact, which was not without its significance when the peasants rose in vengeance on their lords two and twenty years later, that the dispersion of the hamlets and the solitude of the farms had made it customary for the people to go about with fire-arms. Besides encouraging the destruction of noxious beasts, Turgot did something for the preservation of beasts not noxious. The first veterinary school in France had been founded at Lyons in 1762. To this he sent pupils from his province, and eventually he founded a similar school at Limoges. He suppressed a tax on cattle, which acted prejudicially on breeding and grazing; and he introduced clover into the grass-lands. The potato had been unknown in Limousin. It was not common in any part of France; and perhaps this is not astonishing when we remember that the first field crop even in agricultural Scotland is supposed only to have been sown in the

fourth decade of that century. People would not touch it, though the experiment of persuading them to cultivate this root had been frequently tried. In the Limousin the people were even more obstinate in their prejudice than elsewhere. But Turgot persevered, knowing how useful potatoes would be in a land where scarcity of grain was so common. The ordinary view was that they were hardly fit for pigs, and that in human beings they would certainly breed leprosy. Some of the English Puritans would not eat potatoes because they are not mentioned in the Bible, and that is perhaps no better a reason than the other. When, however, it was seen that the Intendant had the hated vegetable served every day at his own table, the opposition grew more faint; men were at last brought to consent to use potatoes for their cattle, and after a time even for themselves.

It need scarcely be said that among Turgot's efforts for agricultural improvement, was the foundation of an agricultural society. This was the time when the passion for provincial academies of all sorts was at its height. When we consider that Turgot's society was not practical but deliberative, and what themes he proposed for discussion by it, we may believe that it was one of the less useful of his works. What the farmers needed was something much more directly instructive in the methods of their business, than could come of discussions as to the effects of indirect taxation on the revenues of landowners, or the right manner of valuing the income of land in the different kinds



of cultivation. 'In that most unlucky path of French exertion,' says Arthur Young, 'this distinguished patriot was able to do nothing. This society does like other societies; they meet, converse, offer premiums, and publish nonsense. This is not of much consequence, for the people instead of reading their memoirs are not able to read at all. They can, however, see, and if a farm was established in that good cultivation which they ought to copy, something would be presented from which they *might* learn. I asked particularly if the members of this society had land in their own hands, and was assured that they had; but the conversation presently explained it. 'They had *métayers* round their country seats, and this was considered as farming their own lands, so that they assume something of a merit from the identical circumstance, which is the curse and ruin of the whole country.'

The record of what Turgot did for manufacturing industry and commerce is naturally shorter than that of his efforts for the relief of the land and its cultivators. In the eyes of the modern economist, with his horror of government encouragement to industry, no matter in what time, place, or circumstance, some of Turgot's actions will seem of doubtful wisdom. At Brives, for example, with all the authority of an Intendant, he urged the citizens to provide buildings for carrying on a certain manufacture which he and others thought would be profitable to the town; and as the money for the buildings did not come in very readily,

he levied a rate both on the town and on the inhabitants of the suburbs. His argument was that the new works would prove indirectly beneficial to the whole neighbourhood. He was not long, however, in finding out, as the authors of such a policy generally find out, how difficult it is to reconcile the interests of aided manufactures with those of the taxpayers. It is characteristic, we may remark, of the want of public spirit in the great nobles, that one of Turgot's first difficulties in the affair was to defeat an unjust claim made by no less a personage than the Marshal de Noailles, to a piece of public land on which the proposed works were to be built. A more important industry in the history of Limoges sprang from the discovery, during Turgot's tenure of office, of the china clay which has now made the porcelain of Limoges only second among the French potteries to that of Sèvres itself. The modern pottery has been developed since the close of the Revolution, which checked the establishments and processes that had been directed, encouraged, and supervised by Turgot.

To his superior enlightenment in another part of the commercial field we owe one of the most excellent of Turgot's pieces, his Memorial on Loans of Money. This plan for free trade in money has all the sense and liberality of the brightest side of the eighteenth century illumination. It was suggested by the following circumstance. At Angoulême four or five rogues associated together, and drew bills on one another. On these bills they borrowed money, the average rate

of interest being from eight to ten per cent. When the bills fell due, instead of paying them, they laid informations against the lenders for taking more than the legal rate of interest. The lenders were ruined, persons who had money were afraid to make advances, bills were protested, commercial credit was broken, and the trade of the district was paralysed. Turgot prevailed upon the Council of State to withdraw the cases from the local jurisdiction; the proceedings against the lenders were annulled, and the institution of similar proceedings forbidden. This was a characteristic course. The royal government was generally willing in the latter half of the eighteenth century to redress a given case of abuse, but it never felt itself strong enough, or had leisure enough, to deal with the general source from which the particular grievance sprang. Turgot's Memorial is as cogent an exposure of the mischief of Usury Laws to the public prosperity, as the more renowned pages either of Bentham or J. B. Say on the same subject, and it has the merit of containing an explanation at once singularly patient and singularly intelligent, of the origin of the popular feeling about usury and its adoption by the legislator.

After he had been eight years at his post, Turgot was called upon to deal with the harassing problems of a scarcity of food. In 1770 even the maize and black grain, and the chestnuts on which the people supported life, failed almost completely, and the failure extended over two years. The scarcity very speedily threatened to become a famine, and all its conditions

were exasperated by the unwisdom of the authorities, and the selfish rapacity of the landlords. It needed all the firmness and all the circumspection of which Turgot was capable, to overcome the difficulties which the strong forces of ignorance, prejudice, and greediness raised up against him.

His first battle was on an issue which is painfully familiar to our own Indian administrators at the present time. In 1764, an edict had been promulgated decreeing free trade in grain, not with foreign countries, but among the different provinces of the kingdom. This edict had not made much way in the minds either of the local officials or of the people at large, and the presence of famine made the free and unregulated export of food seem no better than a cruel and outrageous paradox. The parlement of Bordeaux at once suspended the edict of 1764. They ordered that all dealers in grain, farmers of land, owners of land, of whatever rank, quality, or condition, should forthwith convey to the markets of their district 'a sufficient quantity' of grain to provision the said markets. The same persons were forbidden to sell either by wholesale or retail any portion of the said grain at their own granaries. Turgot at once procured from the Council at Versailles the proper instrument for checking this impolitic interference with the free circulation of grain, and he contrived this instrument in such conciliatory terms as to avoid any breach with the parlement, whose motives, for that matter, were respectable enough. In spite, how-

ever, of the action of the government, popular feeling ran high against free markets. Tumultuous gatherings of famishing men and women menaced the unfortunate grain-dealers. Waggoners engaged in carrying grain away from a place where it was cheaper to another place where it was dearer, were violently arrested in their business, and terrified from proceeding. Hunger prevented people from discerning the unanswerable force of the argument that if the grain commanded a higher price somewhere else, that was a sure sign of the need there being more dire. The local officials were as hostile as their humbler neighbours. At the town of Turenne, they forbade grain to be taken away, and forced the owners of it to sell it on the spot at the market rate. At the town of Angoulême the lieutenant of police took upon himself to order that all the grain destined for the Limousin should be unloaded and stored at Angoulême. Turgot brought a heavy hand to bear on these breakers of administrative discipline, and readily procured such sanction as his authority needed from the Council.

One of the most interesting of the measures to which Turgot resorted in meeting the destitution of the country, was the establishment of the Charitable Workshops. Some of the advocates of the famous National Workshops of 1848 have appealed to this example of the severe patriot, for a sanction to their own economic policy. It is not clear that the logic of the Socialist is here more remorseless than usual. If the State may set up workshops to aid people who

are short of food because the harvest has failed, why should it not do the same when people are short of food because trade is bad, work scarce, and wages intolerably low? Of course Turgot's answer would have been that remorseless logic is the most improper instrument in the world for a business of rough expedients, such as government is. There is a vital difference in practice between opening a public workshop in the exceptional emergency of a famine, and keeping public workshops open as a normal interference with the free course of industrial activity. For the moment the principle may appear to be the same, but in reality the application of the principle means in the latter case the total disorganisation of industry; in the former it means no more than a temporary breach of the existing principles of organisation, with a view to its speedier revival. To invoke Turgot as a dabbler in Socialism because he opened *ateliers de charité*, is as unreasonable as it would be to make an English minister who should suspend the Bank Charter Act in a crisis, into the champion of an inconvertible paper currency. Turgot always regarded the sums paid in his works, not as wages, but as alms. All that he urged was that 'the best and most useful kind of alms consists in providing means for earning them.' To prevent the workers from earning aid with as little trouble to themselves as possible, he recommended payment by the piece and not by the day. To check workers from flocking in from their regular employments, he insisted on the wages being kept

below the ordinary rate, and he urged the propriety of driving as sharp bargains as possible in fixing the price of the piece of work. To prevent the dissipation of earnings at the tavern, he paid not in money, but in leathern tokens, that were only current in exchange for provisions. All these regulations mark a wide gulf between the Economist of 1770 and the Socialist of 1848. Nobody was sterner than Turgot against beggars, the inevitable scourge of every country where the evils of vicious economic arrangements are aggravated by the mischievous views of the Catholic clergy, first, as to the duties of promiscuous almsgiving, and second, as to the virtue of improvident marriages. In 1614 the States General had been for hanging all mendicants, and Colbert had sent them to the galleys. Turgot was less rigorous than that, but he would not suffer his efforts for the economic restoration of his province to be thwarted by the influx of these devouring parasites, and he sent every beggar on whom hands could be laid to prison.

The story of the famine in the Limousin brings to light some instructive facts as to the temper of the lords and rich proprietors on the eve of the changes that were to destroy them. Turgot had been specially anxious that as much as possible of what was necessary for the relief of distress should be done by private persons. He knew the straits of the government. He knew how hard it would be to extract from it the means of repairing a deficit in his own finances. Accordingly he invited the landowners, not merely

to contribute sums of money in return for the public works carried on in their neighbourhood, but also, by way of providing employment to their indigent neighbours, to undertake such works as they should find convenient on their own estates. The response was disappointing. 'The districts,' he wrote in 1772, 'where I have works on foot, do not give me reason to hope for much help on the side of the generosity of the nobles and the rich landowners. The Prince de Soubise is so far the only person who has given anything for the works that have been executed in his duchy.' Nor was abstinence from generosity the worst part of this failure in public spirit. The same nobles and landowners who refused to give, did not refuse to take away. Most of them proceeded at once to dismiss their *métayers*, the people who farmed their lands in consideration of a fixed proportion of the produce. Turgot, in an ordinance of admirable gravity, remonstrated against this harsh and impolitic proceeding. He pointed out that the unfortunate wretches, thus stripped of every resource, would have to leave the district, abandoning their wives and children to the charity of villages that were already overburdened with the charge of their own people. To cast this additional load on the villages was all the more unjust, because the owners of land had been exempted from one-half of the taxes levied on the owners of other property, exactly because the former were expected to provide for their own peasants. It was a claim less of humanity than of bare justice, that



the landowners should do something for men with whom their relations had been so close as to be almost domestic, and to whose hard toil their masters owed all that they possessed. As a mere matter of self-interest, moreover, apart alike from both justice and humanity, the death or flight of the labourers would leave the proprietors helpless when the next good season came, and for want of hands the land would be doomed to barrenness for years to come, to the grievous detriment no less of the landowners than of the whole people of the realm. Accordingly, Turgot ordered all those who had dismissed their *métayers* to take them back again, and he enacted generally that all proprietors, of whatever quality or condition, and whether privileged or not, should be bound to keep and support until the next harvest all the labourers who had been on their land in the previous October, as well women and children as men.

Turgot's policy in this matter is more instructive as to the social state of France, than it may at first sight appear. At first sight we are astonished to find the austere economist travelling so far from the orthodox path of free contract as to order a landowner to furnish at his own cost subsistence for his impoverished tenants. But the truth is that the *métayer* was not a free tenant in the sense which we attach to the word. '*In Limousin*,' says Arthur Young, '*the métayers are considered as little better than menial servants.*' And it is not going beyond the evidence to say that they were even something lower than menial servants.

they were really a kind of serf-caste. They lived in the lowest misery. More than half of them were computed to be deeply in debt to the proprietors. In many cases they were even reduced every year to borrow from their landlord, before the harvest came round, such coarse bread of mixed rye and barley as he might choose to lend them. What Turgot therefore had in his mind was no relation of free contract, though it was that legally, but a relation which partly resembled that of a feudal lord to his retainer, and partly—as Sir Henry Maine has hinted—that of a planter to his negroes. It is less surprising, then, that Turgot should have enforced some of the responsibilities of the lord and the planter.

The nobles had resort to a still more indefensible measure than the expulsion of their *métayers*. Most of the lands in the Generality of Limoges were charged with dues in kind payable to the lords. As the cultivators had for the most part no grain even for their own bread, they naturally had no grain for the lord's dues. The lords then insisted on payment in cash, and they insisted on estimating this payment at the average price of the grain. Most of them were really as needy as they were idle and proud, and nothing so inordinately grasping as the indigence of class-ride. The effect of their proceedings now was to increase their revenue fourfold and fivefold out of public calamity and universal misery. And unfortunately the liability of the cultivators in a given manor was *solidaire*; they were jointly and severally respon-

sible, and the effect of this was that even those who were in circumstances to pay the quadrupled dues, were ruined and destroyed without morey in consequence of having also to pay the quadrupled dues of their beggared neighbours. Turgot arrested this odious process by means of an old and forgotten decree, which he prevailed upon the parlement of Bordeaux to revive in good and due form, to the effect that the arrears of dues in kind for 1769 should be paid at the market price of grain when the dues were payable; that is, before the scarcity had declared itself.

When we consider the grinding and extortionate spirit thus shown in face of a common calamity, we may cease to wonder at the ferocity with which, when the hour struck, the people tore away privilege, distinction, and property itself from classes that had used all three only to ruin the land and crush its inhabitants into the dust. And the moment that the lord had thus transformed himself into a mere creditor, and a creditor for goods delivered centuries ago, and long since consumed and forgotten, then it was certain that, if political circumstances favoured the growing economic sentiment, there would be heard again the old cry of the Roman plebs for an agrarian law and *novæ tabulæ*. Nay, something was heard that is amazingly like the cry of the modern Irish peasant. In 1776 two noteworthy incidents happened. A certain Marquis de Vibraye threw into prison a peasant who refused to pay the *droit de cens*. Immediately

between thirty and forty peasants came to the rescue, armed themselves, besieged the chateau, took it and sacked it, and drove the Marquis de Vibraye away in terror. Still more significant is the second incident, which happened shortly after. A relative of the Duke of Mortemart, shooting on his property, was attacked by peasants who insisted that he should cease his sport. They treated him with much brutality, and even threatened to fire on him and his attendants, '*claiming to be free masters of their lands.*' Here was the main root of the great French Revolution. A fair consideration of the details of such an undertaking as Turgot's administration of the Limousin helps us to understand two things: first, that all the ideas necessary for the pacific transformation of French society were there in the midst of it; second, that the system of privilege had fostered such a spirit in one class, and the reaction against the inconsiderate manifestation of that spirit was so violent in the other class, that good political ideas were vain and inapplicable.

It is curious to find that, in the midst of his beneficent administration, Turgot was rating practical work very low in comparison with the achievements of the student and the thinker. 'You are very fortunate,' Condorcet said to him, 'in having a passion for the public good, and in being able to satisfy it; it is a great consolation, and of a very superior order to the consolation of mere study.' 'Nay,' replied Turgot, in his next letter, 'whatever you may say, I

believe that the satisfaction derived from study is superior to any other kind of satisfaction. I am perfectly convinced that one may be, through study, a thousand times more useful to men than in any of our subordinate posts. There we torment ourselves, and often without any compensating success, to secure some small benefits, while we are the involuntary instrument of evils that are by no means small. All our small benefits are transitory, while the light that a man of letters is able to diffuse must, sooner or later, destroy all the artificial evils of the human race, and place it in a position to enjoy all the goods that nature offers.' It is clear that we can only accept Turgot's preference, on condition that the man of letters is engaged on work that seriously advances social interests and adds something to human stature. Most literature, nearly all literature, is distinctly subordinate and secondary ; it only serves to pass the time of the learned or cultured class, without making any definite mark either on the mental habits of men and women, or on the institutions under which they live. Compared with such literature as this, the work of an administrator who makes life materially easier and more hopeful to the half-million of persons living in the Generality of Limoges or elsewhere, must be pronounced emphatically the worthier and more justly satisfactory.<sup>1</sup>

Turgot himself, however, found time, in his industry at Limoges, to make a contribution to a kind

<sup>1</sup> See vol. i. p. 290.

of literature which has seriously modified the practical arrangements and social relations of the western world. In 1766 he published his *Essay on the Formation and Distribution of Wealth*—a short but most pithy treatise, in which he anticipated some of the leading economic principles of that greater work by Adam Smith, which was given to the world ten years later. Turgot's *Essay* has none of the breadth of historic outlook, and none of the amplitude of concrete illustrations from real affairs, which make the *Wealth of Nations* so deeply fertile, so persuasive, so interesting, so thoroughly alive, so genuinely enriching to the understanding of the judicious reader. But the comparative dryness of Turgot's too concise form does not blind the historian of political economy to the merit of the substance of his propositions. It was no small proof of originality and enlightenment to precede Adam Smith by ten years in the doctrines of free trade, of free industry, of loans on interest, of the constitutive elements of price, of the effects of the division of labour, of the processes of the formation of capital. The passage on interest will bear reproducing once more:—'We may regard the rate of interest as a kind of level, below which all labour, all cultivation, all industry, all commerce ceases. It is like a sea spreading out over a vast district; the tops of the mountains rise above the waters and form fertile and cultivated islands. If the sea by any chance finds an outlet, then in proportion as it goes down, first the slopes, next the plains and valleys,

appear and clothe themselves with productions of every kind. It is enough that the sea rises or falls by a foot, to inundate vast shores, or to restore them to cultivation and plenty.' There are not many illustrations at once so apt and so picturesque as this; but most of the hundred paragraphs that make up the Reflections are, notwithstanding one or two of the characteristic crotchets of Quesnai's school, both accurate and luminous.

## V.

In May 1774 Lewis xv. died. His successor was only twenty years old; he was sluggish in mind, vacillating in temper, and inexperienced in affairs. Maurepas was recalled, to become the new king's chief adviser; and Maurepas, at the suggestion of one of Turgot's college friends, summoned the Intendant from Limoges, and placed him at the head of the department of marine. This post Turgot only held for a couple of months; he was then preferred to the great office of Controller-General. The condition of the national finance made its administration the most important of all the departments of the government. Turgot's policy in this high sphere belongs to the general history of France, and there is no occasion for us to reproduce its details here. It was mainly an attempt to extend over the whole realm the kind of reforms which had been tried on a small scale in the Limousin. He suppressed the *corvées*, and he

acked the money payment which was substituted for that burden on to the Twentieths, an impost from which the privileged class was not exempt. 'The weight of this charge,' he made the king say in the edict of suppression, 'now falls and must fall only on the poorest classes of our subjects.' This truth only added to the exasperation of the rich, and perhaps might well have been omitted. Along with the *corvées* were suppressed the *jurandes*, or exclusive industrial corporations or trade-guilds, whose monopolies and restrictions were so mischievous an impediment to the wellbeing of the country. In the preamble to this edict we seem to be breathing the air, not of Versailles in 1775, but of the Convention in 1793:—'God, when he made man with wants, and rendered labour an indispensable resource, made the right of work the property of every individual in the world, and this property is the first, the most sacred, and the most imprescriptible of all kinds of property. We regard it as one of the first duties of our justice, and as one of the acts most of all worthy of our benevolence, to free our subjects from every infraction of that inalienable right of humanity.'

Again, Turgot removed a tax from certain forms of lease, with a view to promote the substitution of a system of farming for the system of *métayers*. He abolished an obstructive privilege by which the Hôtel Dieu had the exclusive right of selling meat during Lent. The whole of the old incoherent and vexatious police of the corn-markets was swept away. Finally,



he inspired the publication of a short but most important writing, Boncerf's *Inconvénients des Droits Flédaux*, in which, without criticising the origin of the privileges of the nobles, the author showed how much it would be to the advantage of the lords to accept a commutation of their feudal dues. What was still more exasperating both to nobles and lawyers was the author's hardy assertion that if the lord refused the offer of their vassals, the king had the power to settle the question for them by his own legislative authority. This was the most important and decisive of the pre-revolutionary tracts.

Equally violent prejudices and more sensitive interests were touched by two other sets of proposals. The minister began to talk of a new territorial contribution, and a great survey and re-assessment of the land. Then followed an edict restoring in good earnest the free circulation of corn within the kingdom. Turgot was a partisan of free trade in its most entire application; but for the moment he contented himself with the free importation of grain and its free circulation at home, without sanctioning its exportation abroad. Apart from changes thus organically affecting the industry of the country, Turgot dealt sternly with certain corruptions that had crept into the system of tax-farming, as well as with the monstrous abuses of the system of court-pensions.

The measures we have enumerated were all excellent in themselves, and the state of the kingdom was such as urgently to call for them. They were steps

towards the construction of a fabric of freedom and justice. But they provoked a host of bitter and irreconcilable enemies, while they raised up no corresponding host of energetic supporters. The reason of the first of these circumstances is plain enough, but the second demands a moment's consideration. That the country clergy should denounce the Philosopher, as they called him, from the pulpit and the steps of the altar, was natural enough. Many even of his old colleagues of the *Encyclopædia* had joined Necker against the minister. The greatest of them all, it is true, stood by Turgot with unfailing staunchness; a shower of odes, diatribes, dialogues, allegories, dissertations, came from the Patriarch of Ferney to confound and scatter the enemies of the new reforms. But the people were unmoved. If Turgot published an explanation of the high price of grain, they perversely took explanation for gratulation, and thought the Controller preferred to have bread dear. If he put down seditious risings with a strong hand, they insisted that he was in nefarious league with the corn-merchants and the bakers. How was it that the people did not recognise the hand of a benefactor? The answer is that they suspected the source of the new reforms too virulently to judge them calmly. For half a century, as Condorcet says pregnantly, they had been undergoing the evils of anarchy, while they supposed that they were feeling those of despotism. The error was grave, but it was natural, and one effect of it was to make every measure that proceeded



now played out; room was now for the men of destiny.'

If the repudiation of a popular assembly was the cardinal error in Turgot's scheme of policy, there were other errors added. The publication of Boncerf's attack on the feudal dues, with the undisguised sanction of the minister, has been justly condemned as a grave imprudence, and as involving a forgetfulness of the true principles of government and administration, that would certainly not have been committed either by Colbert, in whom Turgot professed to seek his model, nor by Gournai, who had been his master. It was a broad promise of reforms which Turgot was by no means sure of being able to persuade the king and his council to adopt. By prematurely divulging his projects, it augmented the number of his adversaries, without being definite enough to bring new friends.<sup>1</sup> Again, Turgot did nothing to redeem it by personal conciliatoriness in carrying out the designs of a benevolent absolutism. The Count of Provence, afterwards Lewis XVIII., wrote a satire on the government during Turgot's ministry, and in it there is a picture of the great reformer as he appeared to his enemies: 'There was then in France an awkward, heavy, clumsy creature; born with more rudeness than character, more obstinacy than firmness, more impetuosity than tact; a charlatan in administration no less than in virtue, exactly formed to get the one

<sup>1</sup> See Mauguin's *Etudes Historiques sur l'Administration de l'Agriculture*, i. 352.

doeried and to disgust the world with the other; made harsh and distant by his self-love, and timid by his pride; as much a stranger to men, whom he had never known, as to the public weal, which he had never seen aright; this man was called 'Turgot.'

It is a mistake to take the word of political adversaries for a man's character, but adversaries sometimes only say out aloud what is already suspected by friends. The coarse account given by the Count of Provence shows us where 'Turgot's weakness as a ruler may have lain. He was distant and stiff in manner, and encouraged no one to approach him. Even his health went against him, for at a critical time in his short ministry he was confined to bed by gout for four months, and he could see nobody save clerks and secretaries. The very austerity, loftiness, and purity, which make him so reverend and inspiring a figure in the pages of the noble-hearted Condorcet, may well have been impediments in dealing with a society that, in the fatal words of the Roman historian, could bear neither its disorders nor their remedies.

The king had once said pathetically: 'It is only M. Turgot and I who love the people.' But even with the king, there were points at which the minister's philosophic severity strained their concord. Turgot was the friend of Voltaire and Condorcet; he counted Christianity a form of superstition; and he, who as a youth had refused to go through life wearing the mask of the infidel abbé, had too much self-respect in his manhood to practise the rites and uses of a system which

he considered a degradation of the understanding. One day the king said to Maurepas: 'You have given me a Controller-general who never goes to mass.' 'Sire,' replied that ready worldling, 'the Abbé Terray always went'—and Terray had brought the government to bankruptcy. But Turgot hurt the king's conscience more directly than by staying away from mass and confession. Faithful to the long tradition of his ancestors, Lewis XVI. wished the ceremony of his coronation to take place at Rheims. Turgot urged that it should be performed at Paris, and as cheaply as possible. And he advanced on to still more delicate ground. In the rite of consecration, the usage was that the king should take an oath to pursue all heretics. Turgot demanded the suppression of this declaration of intolerance. It was pointed out to him that it was only a formality. But Turgot was one of those severe and scrupulous souls, to whom a wicked promise does not cease to be degrading by becoming hypocritical. And he was perfectly justified. It was only by the gradual extinction of the vestiges of her ancient barbarisms, as occasion offered, that the Church could have escaped the crash of the Revolution. Meanwhile, the king and the priests had their own way: the king was crowned at Rheims, and the priests exacted from him an oath to be unjust, oppressive, and cruel towards a portion of his subjects. Turgot could only remonstrate; but the philosophic memorial in which he protested in favour of religious freedom and equality, gave the king a serious shock.



equally inconsolable, and still more violent in the expression of his grief. When he had become somewhat calmer, he composed those admirable verses,—  
*To a Man:*

Philosophe indulgent, ministre citoyen,  
 Qui ne cherchas le vrai que pour faire le bien,  
 Qui d'un peuple léger et trop ingrat peut-être  
 Préparais le bonheur et celui de son maître,  
 Ce qu'on nomme disgrâce a payé tes bienfaits.  
 Le vrai prix de travail n'est que de vivre en paix.

Turgot at first showed some just and natural resentment at the levity with which he had been banished from power, and he put on no airs of theatrical philosophy. He would have been untrue to the sincerity of his character, if he had affected indifference or satisfaction at seeing his beneficent hopes forever destroyed. But *chagrin* did not numb his industry or his wide interests. Condorcet went to visit him some months after his fall. He describes Turgot as reading Ariosto, as making experiments in physics, and as having forgotten all that had passed within the last two years, save when the sight of evils that he would have mitigated or removed, happened to remind him of it. He occupied himself busily with chemistry and optics, with astronomy and mechanics, and above all with meteorology, which was a new science in those days, and the value of which to the study of the conditions of human health, of the productions of the earth, of navigation, excited his most urgent anticipations. Turgot also was so moved by



the necessity for a new synthesis of life and knowledge as to frame a plan for a great work 'on the human soul, the order of the universe, the Supreme Being, the principles of societies, the rights of men, political constitutions, legislation, administration, physical education, the means of perfecting the human race relatively to the progressive advance and employment of their forces, to the happiness of which they are susceptible, to the extent of the knowledge to which they may attain, to the certainty, clearness, and simplicity of the principles of conduct, to the purity of the feelings that spring up in men's souls.' While his mind was moving through these immense spaces of thought, he did not forget the things of the hour. He invented a machine for serving ship's cables. He wrote a plea for allowing Captain Cook's vessel to remain unmolested during the American war. With Adam Smith, with Dr. Price, with Franklin, with Hume, he kept up a grave and worthy correspondence. Of his own countrymen, Condorcet was his most faithful friend and disciple, and it is much to Condorcet's credit that this was so, for Turgot never gave way to the passionate impulses of the philosophic school against what Voltaire called the Infamous, that is to say, against the Church, her doctrines, her morality, her history.

We have already said that the keyword to Turgot's political aims and social theory was not Pity nor Benevolence, but Justice. It was Justice also, not temporary Prejudice nor Passion, that guided his judgment through the heated issues of the time.

This justice and exact reasonableness it was impossible to surprise or throw off its guard. His sublime intellectual probity never suffered itself to be tempted. He protested against the doctrines of Helvétius's book, *de l'Esprit*, and of D'Holbach's *Système de la Nature*, at a moment when some of his best friends were enthusiastic in admiration, for no better reason than that the doctrines of the two books were hateful to the ecclesiastics and destructive of the teaching of the Church. In the course of a discussion, Condorcet had maintained that in general scrupulous persons are not fit for great things: a Christian, he said, will waste in subduing the darts of the flesh time that he might have employed upon things that would have been useful to humanity; he will never venture to rise against tyrants, for fear of having formed a hasty judgment, and so forth in other cases. 'No virtue,' replies Turgot, 'in whatever sense you take the word, can dispense with justice; and I think no better of the people who do your *great things* at the cost of justice, than I do of poets who fancy that they can produce great wonders of imagination without order and regularity. I know that excessive precision tends to deaden the fire alike of action and of composition; but there is a medium in everything. There has never been any question in our controversy of a capuchin wasting his time in quenching the darts of the flesh, though, by the way, in the whole sum of time wasted, the term expressing the time lost in satisfying the appetites of the flesh would probably

be found to be decidedly the greater of the two. This parenthesis is one of a hundred illustrations of Turgot's habitual refusal to be carried out of the narrow path of exact rationality, or to take for granted a single word of the common form of the dialect even of his best friends and closest associates. And the readiness with which men fall into common form, the levity with which they settle the most complex and difficult issues, stirred in Turgot what Michelet calls *féroçité*, and Mr. Matthew Arnold calls *seem indignatio*. 'Turgot was filled with an astonished, awful, oppressive sense of the *immoral thoughtlessness* of men; of the heedless, hazardous way in which they deal with things of the greatest moment to them; of the immense, incalculable misery which is due to this cause' (*M. Arnold*).

Turgot died on the 20th of March 1781, leaving to posterity the memory of a character which was more perfect and imposing than his performances. Condorcet saw in this harmonious union and fine balance of qualities the secret of his unpopularity. 'Envy,' he says, 'seems more closely to attend a character that approaches perfection, than one that, while astonishing men by its greatness, yet by exhibiting a mixture of defects and vices, offers a consolation that envy seeks.'

## CONDORCET.

OF the illustrious thinkers and writers who for two generations had been actively scattering the seed of evolution in France, only Condorcet survived to behold the first bitter ingathering of the harvest. Those who had sown the wind were no more; he only was left to see the reaping of the whirlwind, and to be swiftly and cruelly swept away by it. Voltaire and Diderot, Rousseau and Helvétius, had vanished, but Condorcet both assisted at the Encyclopædia and at in the Convention; the one eminent man of those who had tended the tree, who also came in due season to partake of its fruit; at once a precursor, and a harer in the fulfilment. In neither character has he attracted the goodwill of any of those considerable sections and schools into which criticism of the Revolution has been mainly divided. As a thinker he is roughly classed as an Economist, and as a practical politician he figured first in the Legislative Assembly, and then in the Convention. Now, as a rule, the political parties that have most admired the Convention have had least sympathy with the Economists, and the historians who are most favour-

able to Turgot and his followers, are usually most hostile to the actions and associations of the great revolutionary chamber successively swayed by a Vergniaud, a Danton, a Robespierre. Between the two, Condorcet's name has been allowed to lie hidden for the most part in a certain obscurity, or else has been covered with those taunts and innuendoes, which partisans are wont to lavish on men of whom they do not know exactly whether they are with or against them.

Generally the men of the Revolution are criticised in blocks and sections, and Condorcet cannot be accurately placed under any of these received schools. He was an Economist, but he was something more; for the most characteristic article in his creed was a passionate belief in the infinite perfectibility of human nature. He was more of a Girondin than a Jacobin, yet he did not always act, any more than he always thought, with the Girondins, and he did not fall when they fell, but was proscribed by a decree specially levelled at himself. Isolation of this kind is assuredly no merit in political action, but it explains the coldness with which Condorcet's memory has been treated; it flowed from some marked singularities both of character and opinion which are of the highest interest, if we consider the position of the man and the lustre of that ever-memorable time. 'Condorcet,' said D'Alembert, 'is a volcano covered with snow.' Said another, less picturesquely: 'He is a sheep in a passion.' 'You may say of the intelligence of

Condorcet in relation to his person,' wrote Madame Roland, 'that it is a subtle essence soaked in cotton.' The curious mixture disclosed by sayings like these, of warm impulse and fine purpose with immovable reserve, only shows that he of whom they were spoken belonged to the class of natures which may be called non-conducting. They are not effective, because without this effluence of power and feeling from within, the hearer or onlooker is stirred by no sympathetic thrill. They cannot be the happiest, because consciousness of the inequality between expression and meaning, between the influence intended and the impression conveyed, must be as tormenting as to one who dreams is the vain effort to strike a blow. If to be of this non-conducting temperament is impossible in the really greatest characters, like St. Paul, St. Bernard, or Luther, at least it is no proper object of blame, for it is constantly the companion of lofty and generous aspiration. It was perhaps unfortunate that Condorcet should have permitted himself to be drawn into a position where his want of that magical quality by which even Marat could gain the sympathies of men, should be so conspicuously made visible. The character of Condorcet, unlike so many of his contemporaries, offers nothing to the theatrical instinct. None the less on his account should we be willing to weigh the contributions which he made to the stock of science and social speculation, and recognise the fine elevation of his sentiments, his noble solicitude for human well-

being, his eager and resolute belief in its indefinite expansion, and the devotion which sealed his faith by a destiny that was as tragical as any in those bloody and most tragical days.

## I.

Until the outbreak of the Revolution, the circumstances of Condorcet's life were as little externally disturbed or specially remarkable as those of any other geometer and thinker of the time. He was born at a small town in Picardy, in the year 1743. His father was a cavalry officer, but as he died when his son was only three years old, he could have exerted no influence upon the future philosopher, save such as comes of transmission through blood and tissue. Condillac was his uncle, but there is no record of any intercourse between them. His mother was a devout and trembling soul, who dedicated her child to the Holy Virgin, and for eight years or more made him wear the dress of a little girl, by way of sheltering him against the temptations and unbelief of a vile world. So long as women are held by opinion and usage in a state of educational and political subjection, which prevents the growth of a large intelligence made healthy and energetic by knowledge and by activity, we may expect pious extravagances of this kind. Condorcet was weakened physically by much confinement and the constraint of cumbrous clothing; and not even his dedication to the Holy Virgin prevented him from

growing up the most ardent of the admirers of Voltaire. His earliest instructors, as happened to most of the sceptical philosophers, were the Jesuits, then within a few years of their fall. That these adroit men, armed with all the arts and traditions which their order had acquired in three centuries, and with the training of the nation almost exclusively in their hands, should still have been unable to shield their persons from proscription and their creed from hatred, is a remarkable instance how little it avails ecclesiastical bodies to have a monopoly of official education, if the spirit of their teaching be out of harmony with those most potent agencies which we sum up as the spirit of the time. The Jesuits were the great official instructors of France for the first half of the eighteenth century. In 1764 the order was thrust forth from the country, and they left behind them an army of the bitterest enemies that Christianity has ever had. To do them justice, they were destroyed by weapons which they had themselves supplied. The intelligence which they had developed and sharpened, turned inevitably against the incurable faults in their own system. They were admirable teachers of mathematics. Condorcet, instructed by the Jesuits at Rheims, was able when he was only fifteen years old to go through such performances in analysis as to win especial applause from illustrious judges like D'Alembert and Clairaut. It was impossible, however, for Jesuits, as it has ever been for all enemies of movement, to constrain within prescribed



limits the activity which has once been effectively stirred. Mathematics has always been in the eyes of the Church a harmless branch of knowledge, but the mental energy that mathematics first touched is sure to turn itself by and by to more complex and dangerous subjects in the scientific hierarchy.

At any rate, Condorcet's curiosity was very speedily drawn to problems beyond those which geometry and algebra pretend to solve. 'For thirty years,' he wrote in 1790, 'I have hardly ever passed a single day without meditating on the political sciences.'<sup>1</sup> Thus, when only seventeen, when the ardour of even the choicest spirits is usually most purely intellectual, moral and social feeling was rising in Condorcet to that supremacy which it afterwards attained in him to so admirable a degree. He wrote essays on integral calculus, but he was already beginning to reflect upon the laws of human societies and the conditions of moral obligation. At the root of Condorcet's nature was a profound sensibility of constitution. One of his biographers explains his early enthusiasm for virtue and human welfare as the conclusion of a kind of syllogism. It is possible that the syllogism was only the later shape into which an instinctive impulse threw itself by way of rational entrenchment. His sensibility caused Condorcet to abandon the barbarous pleasures of the chase, which had at first powerfully attracted him.<sup>2</sup> To derive delight from what inflicts

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv. de Condorcet* (12 vols. 1847-49), ix. 489.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* i. 220.

pain on any sentient creature revolted his conscience and offended his reason, because he perceived that the character which does not shrink from associating its own joy with the anguish of another, is either found or left mortally blunted to the finest impressions of humanity.

It is thus assured that from the beginning Condorcet was unable to satisfy himself with the mere knowledge of the specialist, but felt the necessity of placing social aims at the head and front of his life, and of subordinating to them all other pursuits. That he values knowledge only as a means to social action, is one of the highest titles to our esteem that any philosopher can have. Such a temper of mind has penetrated no man more fully than Condorcet, though there are other thinkers to whom time and chance have been more favourable in making that temper permanently productive. 'There is a fine significance in his words, after the dismissal of the great and virtuous Turgot from office: 'We have had a delightful dream, but it was too brief. Now I mean to apply myself to geometry. It is terribly cold to be for the future labouring only for the *gloriele*, after flattering oneself for a while that one was working for the public weal.' It is true that a geometer, too, works for the public weal; but the process is tardier, and we may well pardon an impatience that sprung of reasoned zeal for the happiness of mankind. There is something much more attractive about Condorcet's undisguised disappointment at having to exchange

active public labour for geometrical problems, than in the affected satisfaction conventionally professed by statesmen when driven from place to their beds. His correspondence shows that, even when his mind seemed to be most concentrated upon his special studies, he was incessantly on the alert for every new idea, book, transaction, that was likely to stimulate the love of virtue in individuals, or to increase the strength of justice in society. It would have been in one sense more fortunate for him to have cared less for high social interests, if we remember the contention of his latter days and the catastrophe which brought them to a frightful close. But Condorcet was not one of those natures who can think it happiness to look passively out from the tranquil literary watch-tower upon the mortal struggles of a society in revolution. In measuring other men of science—as his two volumes of *Éloges* abundantly show—one cannot help being struck by the eagerness with which he seizes on any trait of zeal for social improvement, any signal of anxiety that the lives and characters of our fellows should be better worth having. He was himself too absolutely possessed by this social spirit to have flinched from his career, even if he had foreseen the martyrdom which was to consummate it. 'You are very happy,' he once wrote to Turgot, 'in your passion for the public good and your power to satisfy it; it is a great consolation, and of an order very superior to that of study.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* i. 201. See Turgot's wise reply, p. 202.

In 1769, at the age of six-and-twenty, Condorcet became connected with the Academy, to the mortification of his relations, who hardly pardoned him for not being a captain of horse as his father had been before him. About the same time, or a little later, he performed a pilgrimage of a kind that could hardly help making a mark upon a character so deeply impressible. In company with D'Alembert he went to Ferney and saw Voltaire.<sup>1</sup> To the position of Voltaire in Europe in 1770 there has never been any other man's position in any age wholly comparable. It is true that there had been one or two of the great popes, and a great ecclesiastic like St. Bernard, who had exercised a spiritual authority, pretty universally submitted to, or even spontaneously invoked, throughout western Europe. But these were the representatives of a powerful organisation and an accepted system. Voltaire filled a place before men's eyes in the eighteenth century as conspicuous and as authoritative as that of St. Bernard in the twelfth. The difference was that Voltaire's place was absolutely unofficial in its origin, and indebted to no system nor organisation for its maintenance. Again, there have been others, like Bacon or Descartes, destined to make a far more permanent contribution to the ideas which have extended the powers and elevated the happiness of men ; but these great spirits for the most part laboured for the generation that followed them, and won comparatively slight recognition from

<sup>1</sup> Sept. 1770. Voltaire's *Corr.* vol lxxi. p. 147.

their own age. Voltaire during his life enjoyed to the full not only the admiration that belongs to the poet, but something of the veneration that is paid to the thinker, and even something of the glory usually reserved for captains and conquerors of renown. No other man before or since ever hit so exactly the mark of his time on every side, so precisely met the conditions of fame for the moment, nor so thoroughly dazzled and reigned over the foremost men and women who were his contemporaries. Wherever else intellectual fame has approached the fame of Voltaire, it has been posthumous. With him it was immediate and splendid. Into the secret of this extraordinary circumstance we need not here particularly inquire. He was an unsurpassed master of the art of literary expression in a country where that art is more highly prized than anywhere else; he was the most brilliant of wits among a people whose relish for wit is a supreme passion; he won the admiration of the lighter souls by his plays, of the learned by his interest in science, of the men of letters by his never-ceasing flow of essays, criticisms, and articles, not one of which lacks vigour and freshness and sparkle; he was the most active, bitter, and telling foe of what was then the most justly abhorred of all institutions—the Church. Add to these remarkable titles to honour and popularity that he was no mere declaimer against oppression and injustice in the abstract, but the strenuous, persevering, and absolutely indefatigable champion of every victim of



days of the Terror. It dispels some false impressions of Voltaire's supposed intolerance of criticism, to find him thanking Condorcet for one of these friendly protests. He showed himself worthy of such courageous conduct. 'One sees things ill,' he writes, 'when one sees them from too far off. After all, we ought never to blush to go to school if we are as old as Methuselah. I repeat my acknowledgments to you.'<sup>1</sup> Condorcet did not conceive that either to be blind to a man's errors or to compromise them is to prove yourself his friend. There is an integrity of friendship as in public concerns, and he adhered to it as manfully in one as in the other. Throughout his intercourse with intimate friends there is that happy and frank play of direct personal allusion, which is as distinct from flattery when it is about another, as it is from egoism when it refers to the writer himself.

Perhaps we see him most characteristically in his correspondence with Turgot. What Turgot loved in Condorcet was his 'simplicity of character.'<sup>2</sup> Turgot was almost as much less vivacious than Condorcet as Condorcet was less vivacious than Voltaire. They belonged to quite distinct types of character, but this may be a condition of the most perfect forms of sympathy. Each gives support where the other is most conscious of needing it. Turgot was one of those serene, capacious, and sure intelligences whose aspirations do not become low nor narrow by being watchfully held under the control of reason; whose ideas

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* i. 41.<sup>2</sup> *Œuv. de Turgot*, ii. 817.

re no less vigorous or exuberant because they move in a steady and ordered train ; and who, in their most fervent reactions against abuses or crimes, resist that vehement temptation to excess which is the besetting infirmity of generous natures. Condorcet was very different from this. Whatever he wished he wished unrestrainedly. As with most men of the epoch, the habit of making allowances was not his. We observe something theological in his hatred of theologians. Even in his letters the distant ground-swell of repressed passion sounds in the ear, and at every mention of false opinion or evil-doing a sombre and angry shadow seems to fall upon the page. Both he and Turgot clung to the doctrine of the infinite perfectibility of human nature, and the correspondingly infinite augmentation of human happiness ; but Condorcet's ever-smouldering impetuosity would be content with nothing less than the arrival of at least a considerable instalment of this infinite quantity now and instantly. He went so far as to insist that by and by men would acquire the art of prolonging their lives for several generations, instead of being confined within the fatal span of threescore years and ten. He was impatient of any frittering way of life in scruple, tremors, and hesitations. 'For the most part,' he once wrote to Turgot, 'people bounding in scruple are not fit for great things : a Christian will throw away in subduing the darts of the flesh the time which he might have employed on things of use to mankind ; or he will lack courage to



rise against a tyrant for fear of his judgment being too hastily formed.'<sup>1</sup> Turgot's reply may illustrate the difference between the two men: 'No virtue, in whatever sense you take the word, dispenses with justice; and I think no more of the people who do great things—as you say—at the expense of justice, than of poets who fancy they produce great beauties of imagination without regularity. I know that excessive exactitude tends slightly to deaden the fire, alike of composition and of action; but there is a mean in everything. It has never been a question in our controversy of a capuchin who throws away his time in quenching the darts of the flesh (though by the way, in the total of time thrown away the term that expresses the time lost in satisfying these lusts is most likely far greater); no more is it a question of a fool who is afraid of rising against tyrants for fear of forming a rash judgment.'<sup>2</sup>

This ability to conceive a mean case between two extremes was not among Condorcet's gifts. His mind dwelt too much in the region of excess, alike when he measured the possibilities of the good, and coloured the motives and the situation of those whom he counted the bad. A Christian was one who wasted his days in merely resisting the flesh; anybody who declined to rise against a tyrant was the victim of a slavish scrupulosity. He rather sympathises with a scientific traveller, to whom the especial charm of natural history resides in the buffets which, at each step that it takes,

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* i. 228.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* i. 232.

inflicts upon Moses.<sup>1</sup> Well, this temper is not the richest nor the highest, but it often exists in alliance with rich and high qualities. It was so with Condorcet. And we are particularly bound to remember that with him a harsh and impatient humour was not, as is so often the case, the veil for an indolent reluctance to form painstaking judgments. Few workers have been so conscientious as he was, in the labour that he bestowed upon subjects which he held to be worthy of deliberate scrutiny and consideration. His defect was in finding too few of such subjects, and in arriving too many foregone conclusions. Turgot and Montesquieu are perhaps the only two eminent men in France during this part of the century, of whom the same defect might not be alleged. Again, Condorcet's impatience of underlying temperament did not prevent him from filling his compositions with solid, sober, and profound reflections, the products of grave and sustained meditation upon an experience, much of which must have been severely trying and repugnant to a man of his constitution. While recognising this trait, then, let us not overstate either it or its consequences.

The main currents of opinion and circumstance in France, when Condorcet came to take his place among the workers, are now well understood. The third quarter of the century was just closing. Lewis xv. died in 1774; and though his death was of little intrinsic consequence, except as the removal of every

<sup>1</sup> *CEuv.* i. 20.

corrupt heart is of consequence, it is justly taken to mark the date of the beginning of the French Revolution. It was the accidental shifting of position which served to disclose that the existing system was smitten with a mortal paralysis. It is often said that what destroyed the French kingdom was despotism. A sounder explanation discovers the causes less in despotism than in anarchy—anarchy in every department where it could be most ruinous. No substantial reconstruction was possible, because all the evils came from the sinister interests of the nobles, the clergy, or the financiers; and these classes, informally bound together against the common weal, were too strong for either the sovereign or the ablest minister to thrust them aside. The material condition of France was one of supreme embarrassment and disorder, only curable by remedies which the political and social condition of the country made it impossible to employ.

This would explain why a change of some sort was inevitable. But why was the change which actually took place in that direction rather than another? Why did not France sink under her economical disorders, as greater empires than France had done? Why, instead of sinking and falling asunder, did the French people advance with a singleness of impulse unknown before in their history to their own deliverance? How was it that they overthrow the system that was crushing them, and purged themselves with fire and sword of those who administered and maintained it, defying the hopes of the nation; and then

successfully encountered the giant's task of beating back reactionary Europe with one arm, and reconstructing the fabric of their own society with the other? The answer to this question is found in the moral and spiritual condition of France. A generation aroused by the great social ideas of the eighteenth century, looking round to survey its own social state, found itself in the midst of the ruin and disorder of the disintegrated system of the twelfth century. The life was gone out of the ancient organisation of Catholicism and Feudalism, and it seemed as if nothing but corruption remained. What enabled the leaders of the nation to discern the horror and despair of this anarchic dissolution of the worn-out old, and what inspired them with hope and energy when they thought of the possible new, was the spiritual preparation that had been in swift progress since the third decade of the century. The forms and methods of this preparation were various, as the temperaments that came beneath its influence. But the school of Voltaire, the school of Rousseau, and the schools of Quesnay and Montesquieu, different as they were at the roots, all alike energetically familiarised the public mind with a firm belief in human reason, and the idea of the natural rights of man. They impregnated it with a growing enthusiasm for social justice. It is true that we find Voltaire complaining towards the close of his days, of the century being satiated and weary, *un siècle dégoûté*, not knowing well what it wanted. 'The public,' he said, 'has been eighty years

at table, and now it drinks a little bad cognac at the end of its meal.<sup>1</sup> In literature and art this was true; going deeper than these, the public was eager and sensitive with a freshness far more vital and more fruitful than it had known eighty years back. Sitting down with a keen appetite for taste, erudition, and literary knowledge, men had now risen up from a dazzling and pulling board, with a new hunger and thirst after social righteousness. This was the noble faith that saved France, by this sign she was victorious. A people once saturated with a passionate conception of justice is not likely to fall into a Byzantine stage. That destiny only awaits nations where the spiritual power is rigorously confined in the hands of castes and official churches, which systematically and of their very constitution bury justice under the sterile accumulations of a fixed superstition.

Condorcet's principles were deeply coloured by ideas drawn from two sources. He was a Voltairian in the intensity of his antipathies to the Church, and in the depth and energy of his humanity. But while Voltaire flourished, the destructive movement only reached theology, and Voltaire, though he had more to do than anybody else with the original impulse, joined in no attack upon the State. It was from the economical writers and from Montesquieu that Condorcet learned to look upon societies with a scientific eye, to perceive the influence of institutions upon men, and that there are laws, susceptible of modifica-

<sup>1</sup> Letters to Condorcet (1774). *Œuvres* I. 25.

tion in practice, which regulate their growth. It was natural, therefore, that he should join with eagerness in the reforming movement which set in with such irrestrainable velocity after the death of Lewis xv. He was bitter and destructive with the bitterness of Voltaire; he was hopeful for the future with the faith of Turgot; and he was urgent, heated, impetuous, with a heavy vehemence all his own. In a word, he was the incarnation of the revolutionary spirit, as the revolutionary spirit existed in geometers and Encyclopædists; at once too reasonable and too little reasonable; too precise and scientific and too vague; too rigorously logical on the one hand and too abundantly passionate on the other. Perhaps there is no more fatal combination in politics than the deductive method worked by passion. When applied to the delicate and complex affairs of society, such machinery with such motive force is of ruinous potency.

Condorcet's peculiarities of political antipathy and preference can hardly be better illustrated than by his view of the two great revolutions in English history. The first was religious, and therefore he hated it; the second was accompanied by much argument, and had no religion about it, and therefore he extolled it. It is scientific knowledge, he said, which explains why efforts after liberty in unenlightened centuries are so fleeting, and so deeply stained by bloodshed. 'Compare these with the happy efforts of America and France; observe even in the same century, but at different epochs, the two

revolutions of England fanatical and England enlightened. We see on the one side contemporaries of Prynne and Knox, while crying out that they are fighting for heaven and liberty, cover their unhappy country with blood in order to cement the tyranny of the hypocrite Cromwell; on the other, the contemporaries of Boyle and Newton establish with pacific wisdom the freest constitution in the world.<sup>1</sup> It is not wonderful that his own revolution was misunderstood by one who thus loved English Whigs, but hated English Republicans; who could forgive an aristocratic faction grasping power for their order, but who could not sympathise with a nation rising and smiting its oppressor, where they smote in the name of the Lord and of Gideon, nor with a ruler who used his power with noble simplicity in the interests of his people, and established in the heart of the nation a respect for itself such as she has never known since, simply because this ruler knew nothing about *principes* or the Rights of Man. However, Nemesis comes. By and by Condorcet found himself writing a piece to show that our Revolution of 1688 was very inferior in lawfulness to the French Revolution of the Tenth of August.<sup>2</sup>

## II.

The course of events after 1774 is in its larger features well known to every reader. Turgot, after

<sup>1</sup> *Éloge de Franklin*, iii. 422.

<sup>2</sup> *Réflexions sur la Rév. de 1688, et sur celle du 10 Août*, xii. 107.

a month of office at the Admiralty, was in August made Controller-General of Finance. With his accession to power, the reforming ideas of the century became practical. He nominated Condorcet to be Inspector of Coinage, an offer which Condorcet deprecated in these words: 'It is said of you in certain quarters that money costs you nothing when there is any question of obliging your friends. I should be bitterly ashamed of giving any semblance of foundation to these absurd speeches. I pray you, do nothing for me just now. Though not rich, I am not pressed for money. Entrust to me some important task—the reduction of measures for instance; then wait till my labours have really earned some reward.'<sup>1</sup> In this patriotic spirit he undertook, along with two other eminent men of science, the task of examining certain projects for canals which engaged the attention of the minister. 'People will tell you,' he wrote, 'that I have got an office worth two hundred and forty pounds. Utterly untrue. We undertook it out of friendship for M. Turgot; but we refused the payment that was offered.'<sup>2</sup> We may profitably contrast this devotion to the public interest with the rapacity of the clergy and nobles, who drove Turgot from office because he talked of taxing them like their neighbours, and declined to glut their insatiable craving for place and plunder.

Turgot was dismissed (May 1776), and presently Necker was installed in his place. Condorcet had

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* i. 71.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* i. 73, 74.



defended with much vigour and some asperity the policy of free internal trade in corn against Necker, who was for the maintenance of the restrictions on commercial intercourse between the different provinces of the kingdom. Consequently, when the new minister came into office, Condorcet wrote to Maurepas resigning his post. 'I have,' he said, 'declared too decidedly what I think about both M. Necker and his works, to be able to keep any place that depends upon him.'<sup>1</sup> This was not the first taste that Maurepas had had of Condorcet's resolute self-respect. The Duke de la Vrillière, one of the most scandalous persons of the century, was an honorary member of the Academy, and he was the brother-in-law of Maurepas. It was expected from the perpetual secretary that he should compose a eulogy upon the occasion of his death, and Condorcet was warned by friends, who seldom reflect that a man above the common quality owes something more to himself than mere prudence, not to irritate the powerful minister by a slight upon his relation. He was inflexible. 'Would you rather have me persecuted,' he asked, 'for a wrong than for something just and moral? Think, too, that they will pardon my silence much more readily than they would pardon my words, for my mind is fixed not to betray the truth.'<sup>2</sup>

In 1782 Condorcet was elected into the Academy. His competitor was Bailly, over whom he had a majority of one. The true contest lay less between

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* i. 296.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* i. 78.

the two candidates than between D'Alembert and Buffon, who on this occasion are said to have fought one of the greatest battles in the not peaceful history of the Academy, for mighty anger burns even in celestial minds. D'Alembert is said to have exclaimed, we may hope with some exaggeration, that he was better pleased at winning that victory than he would have been to find out the squaring of the circle.<sup>1</sup> Destiny, which had so pitiful a doom in store for the two candidates of that day, soon closed D'Alembert's share in these struggles of the learned and in all others. He died in the following year, and by his last act testified to his trust in the generous character of Condorcet. Having by the benevolence of a lifetime left himself on his deathbed without resources, he confided to his friend's care two old and faithful servants, for whom he was unable to make provision. This charge the philosopher accepted cheerfully, and fulfilled to the end with pious scrupulosity. The affection between Condorcet and D'Alembert had been warm and close as that of some famous pairs of antiquity; a natural attraction of character had clothed community of pursuit and interest with the grace of the highest kind of friendship. Even Condorcet's too declamatory manner only adds a certain dignity to the pathetic passage with which he closes

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* i. 89. Condorcet had 16 votes, and Bailly 15. 'Jamais aucune élection,' says La Harpe, who was all for Buffon, 'n'avait offert ni ce nombre ni ce partage.'—*Philos. du 18ième Siècle*, i. 77. A full account of the election, and of Condorcet's reception, in Grimm's *Corr. Lit.* xi. 50-58.

the noble *Éloge* on his lost friend.<sup>1</sup> Voltaire had been dead these five years, and Turgot, too, was gone. Society offered the survivor no recompense. He found the great world tiresome and frivolous, and he described its pursuits in phrases that are still too faithful to the fact, as 'dissipation without pleasure, vanity without meaning, and idleness without repose.' It was perhaps to soften the oppression of these cruel and tender regrets that in 1786 Condorcet married.<sup>2</sup>

Events were now very close at hand, in comparison with which even the most critical private transactions of Condorcet's life were pale and insignificant. In the tranquil seasons of history, when the steady currents of circumstance bear men along noiseless, the importance of the relations which we contract seems superlative; in times of storm and social wreck these petty fortunes and private chances are engulfed and lost to sight. The ferment was now rapidly rising to its intensest height, and Condorcet was the last man in France to remain cold to the burning agitations of the time. We have already seen how decidedly ten years ago he expressed his preference for political activity over the meditative labours of the student. He now threw himself into the Revolution with all the

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* iii. 109, 110.

<sup>2</sup> His wife, said to be one of the most beautiful women of her time, was twenty-three years younger than himself, and survived until 1822. Cabanis married another sister, and Marshal Grouchy was her brother. Madame Condorcet wrote nothing of her own, except some notes to a translation which she made of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

force of an ardent character imbued with fixed and unalterable convictions. We may well imagine him deploring that the great ones whom he had known, the immortal Voltaire, the lofty-souled Turgot, had been carried away by the unkind gods, before their eyes had seen the restoration of their natural rights to men, and the reign of justice on the earth. The gods after all were kinder than he knew, for they veiled from the sight of the enthusiast of '89 the spectres of '93. History might possibly miss most of its striking episodes, if every actor could know the work to which he was putting his hand; and even Condorcet's faith might have wavered if he had known that between him and the fulfilment of his desires there was to intrude a long and deplorable period of despotism and corruption. Still, the vision which then presented itself to the eyes of good men was sublime; and just as, when some noble and devoted character has been taken away from us, it is a consolation to remember that we had the happiness of his friendship, so too when a generation awakes from one of these inspiring social dreams, the wreck of the aspiration is not total nor unrecompensed. The next best thing to the achievement of high and generous aims is to have sought them.

During the winter of '88 and '89, while all France was astir with elections and preparation for elections for that meeting of the States-General, which was looked to as the nearing dawn after a long night of blackness and misery, Condorcet thought he could

best serve the movement by calling the minds of the electors to certain sides of their duty which they might be in some danger of overlooking. One of the subjects, for example, on which he felt most strongly, but on which his countrymen have not shown any particular sensibility, was slavery and the slave trade.<sup>1</sup> With a terseness and force not always characteristic of his writings, he appealed to the electors, while they were reclaiming their own rights in the name of justice, not to forget the half-million blacks, whose rights had been still more shamefully torn away from them, and whose need of justice was more urgent than their own. In the same spirit he published a vehement and ingenious protest against the admission of representatives from the St. Domingo plantations to the National Assembly, showing how grossly inconsistent it was with every idea of a free and popular chamber that men should sit as representatives of others who had never chosen them, and that they should invoke natural rights in their own favour, when at the same instant they were violating the most elementary and undisputed natural rights of mankind in their own country.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Montesquien, Raynal, and one or two other writers, had attacked slavery long before, and Condorcet published a very effective piece against it in 1781 (*Réflexions sur l'Esclavage des Nègres*; *Œuv.* vii. 68), with an epistle dedicated to the enslaved blacks. About the same time an Abolition Society was formed in France, following the example set in England.

<sup>2</sup> *Au Corps Electoral, contre l'Esclavage des Noirs.* 3 Fév. 1780. *Sur l'Admission des Députés des Planteurs de Saint Domingue.* 1780. ix. 469-486.

Of general precepts he never tired ; one series of them followed another. To us many of them may seem commonplace ; but we should reflect that the election of representatives was an amazing novelty in France, and Condorcet knew men well enough to be aware of the hazards of political inexperience. Beware of choosing a clever knave, he said, because he will follow his own interest and not yours ; but at the same time beware of choosing a man for no better reason than that he is honest, because you need ability quite as much as you need probity. Do not choose a man who has ever taken sides against the liberty of any portion of mankind ; nor one whose principles were never known until he found out that he wanted your votes. Be careful not to mistake heat of head for heat of soul ; because what you want is not heat but force, not violence but steadfastness. Be careful, too, to separate a man's actions from the accidents of his life ; for one may be the enemy or the victim of a tyrant without being the friend of liberty. Do not be carried away by a candidate's solicitations : but at the same time, make allowance for the existing effervescence of spirits. Prefer those who have decided opinions to those who are always inventing plans of conciliation ; those who are zealous for the rights of man to those who only profess pity for the misfortunes of the people ; those who speak of justice and reason, to those who speak of political interests and of the prosperity of commerce. Distrust those who appeal to sentiment in matters that can be decided by reason ;

prefer light to eloquence; and pass over those who declare themselves ready to die for liberty, in favour of those who know in what liberty consists.<sup>1</sup>

In another piece he drew up a list of the rights which the nation had a claim to have recognised, such as the right to make laws, to exact responsibility from the ministers of the crown, to the protection of personal liberty, and to the legal administration of justice by regular judges. These rights he declared it to be the first duty of the Assembly to draw up in a chart that should be the chief corner-stone of the new constitution. Then he proceeded to define the various tasks to which he conceived that the legislative body should forthwith apply itself; and among them, he it said, is no mention of any of those projects of confiscation which circumstances so speedily forced upon the Assembly when it met.<sup>2</sup>

Though many of these precepts designed to guide the electors in their choice of men are sagacious and admirable, they smack strongly of that absolute and abstract spirit which can never become powerful in politics without danger. It is certain that in the spring of '89, Condorcet held hereditary monarchy to be most suitable to 'the wealth, the population, the extent of France, and to the political system of Europe.' Yet the reasons which he gives for thinking this

<sup>1</sup> *Lettres d'un Gentilhomme aux Messieurs du Tiers Etat*, ii. 255-259.

<sup>2</sup> *Réflexions sur les Pouvoirs et Instructions à donner par les Provinces à leurs Députés aux États-Généraux*, ix. 263, 265.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* ix. 266.

are not very cogent, and he can hardly have felt them to be so. It is significant, however, of the little distance which all the most uncompromising and most thoughtful revolutionists saw in front of them, that even Condorcet should, so late as the eve of the assembly of the States-General, have talked about attachment to the forms of monarchy and respect for the royal person and prerogative; and should have represented the notion of the property of the Church undergoing any confiscation, as an invention of the enemies of freedom.<sup>1</sup> Before the year was out, the property of the Church had undergone confiscation; before two years had gone he was an ardent Republican; and in less than twelve months after that he had voted the guilt of the king.

It is worth while to cite here a still more pointed example of the want of prevision, so common and so intelligible at that time. Writing in July 1791, he confutes those who asserted that an established and limited monarchy was a safeguard against a usurper, whose power is only limited by his own audacity and address, by pointing out that the extent of France, its divisions into departments, the separation between the various branches of the administration, the freedom of the press, the multitude of the public prints, were all so many insurmountable barriers against a French Cromwell. 'To anybody who has read with attention the history of the usurpation of

<sup>1</sup> *Réflexions sur les Pouvoirs et Instructions à donner par les Provinces à leurs Députés aux États-Généraux*, ix. 264.



Cromwell, it is clear that a single newspaper would have been enough to stop his success. It is clear that if the people of England had known how to read other books beside their Bible, the hypocritical tyrant, unmasked from his first step, would soon have ceased to be dangerous.' Again, is the nation to be cajoled by some ambitious general, gratifying its desire to be an empire-nation? 'Is this what is asked by true friends of liberty, those who only seek that reason and right should have empire over men? *What provinces, conquered by a French general, will he despoil to buy our suffrages? Will he promise our soldiers, as the consuls promised the citizens of Rome, the pillage of Spain or of Syria?* No, assuredly; it is because we cannot be an empire-nation that we shall remain a free nation.'<sup>1</sup> How few years, alas, between this conclusive reasoning, and the pillage of Italy, the campaign in Syria, the seizure of Spain!

Condorcet was not a member of the Assembly in whose formation and composition he had taken so vivid and practical an interest. The first political functions which he was invited to undertake were those of a member of the municipality of Paris. In the tremendous drama of which the scenes were now opening, the Town-hall of Paris was to prove itself far more truly the centre of movement and action than the Constituent Assembly. The efforts of the Constituent Assembly to build up were tardy and

<sup>1</sup> *Réflexions sur les Pouvoirs et Instructions à donner, par les Provinces à leurs Députés aux Etats-Généraux*, xii. 228, 229, 231.

ineffectual. The activity of the municipality of Paris in pulling down was after a time ceaseless, and it was thoroughly successful. The first mayor was the astronomer Bailly, Condorcet's defeated competitor at the Academy. With the fall of the Bastille, summary hangings at the nearest lantern-post, October insurrection of women, and triumphant and bloody compulsion of king, queen, and Assembly to Paris from Versailles, the two rivals, now colleagues, must have felt that the contests for them were indeed no longer academic. The astronomy of the one and the geometry of the other were for ever done with; and Condorcet's longing for active political life in preference to mere study was gratified to the very full.

Unhappily or not, the movement was beyond the control of anybody who, like Condorcet, had no other force than that of disciplined reason and principle. The Bastille no sooner fell, than the Revolution set in with oceanic violence, in the face of which patriotic intention and irrefragable arguments, even when both intention and arguments were loyally revolutionary, were powerless to save the State. In crises of this overwhelming kind, power of reasoning does not tell and mere goodwill does not tell. Exaltation reaches a pitch at which the physical sensibilities are so quickened as to be supreme over the rest of the nature; and in these moods it is the man gifted with the physical quality, as mysterious and indescribable as it is resistless, of a Marat, to take a bad example, or a Danton, to take a good one, who can 'ride the

whirlwind and direct the storm.' Of this quality Condorcet had nothing. His personal presence inspired a decent respect, but no strong emotion either of fear or admiration or physical sympathy. His voice was feeble, his utterance indistinct; and he never got over that nervous apprehension which the spectacle of large and turbulent crowds naturally rouses in the student. In a revolution after the manner of Lord Somers he would have been invaluable. He thoroughly understood his own principles, and he was a master of the art, so useful in its place and time and so respectable in all places and times, of considering political projects point by point with reference to a definite framework of rational ideas. But this was no time for such an art; this was not a revolution to be guided by reason, not even reason like Condorcet's, streaked with jacobinical fibre. The national ideas in which it had arisen had transformed themselves into tumultuous passion, and from this into frenzied action.

Every politician of real eminence as a reformer possesses one of three elements. One class of men is inspired by an intellectual attachment to certain ideas of justice and right reason: another is moved by a deep pity for the hard lot of the mass of every society: while the third, such men as Richelieu for example, have an instinctive appreciation and passion for wise and orderly government. The great and typical ruler is moved in varying degrees by all three in modern times, when the claims of the poor, the rank and file

of the social army, have been raised to the permanent place that belongs to them. Each of the three types has its own peculiar conditions of success, and there are circumstances in which some one of the three is more able to grapple with the obstacles to order than either of the other two. It soon became very clear that the intellectual quality was not the element likely to quell the tempest that had arisen now.

Let it be said, however, that Condorcet showed himself no pedantic nor fastidious trifler with the tremendous movement which he had contributed to set afoot. The same practical spirit which drove him into the strife, guided him in the midst of it. He never wrung his hands, nor wept, nor bewailed the unreason of the multitudes to whom in vain he preached reason. Unlike the typical man of letters—for he was without vanity—he did not abandon the cause of the Revolution because his suggestions were often repulsed. ‘It would be better,’ he said to the Girondins, ‘if you cared less for personal matters and attended only to public interests.’ Years ago, in his *éloge* on L’Hôpital, he had praised the famous Chancellor for incurring the hostility of both of the two envenomed factions, the League and the Huguenots, and for disregarding the approbation or disapprobation of the people. ‘What operation,’ he asked, ‘capable of producing any durable good, can be understood by the people? How should they know to what extent good is possible? How judge of the means of producing it? It must ever be easier for a charlatan to mislead the people, than

for a man of genius to save it.'<sup>1</sup> Remembering this law, he never lost patience. He was cool and intrepid, if his intrepidity was of the logical sort rather than physical; and he was steadfast to one or two simple aims, if he was on some occasions too rapid in changing his attitude as to special measures. He was never afraid of the spectre, as the incompetent revolutionist is. On the contrary, he understood its whole internal history; he knew what had raised it, what passion and what weakness gave to it substance, and he knew that presently reason would banish it and restore men to a right mind. The scientific spirit implanted in such a character as Condorcet's, and made robust by social meditation, builds up an impregnable fortitude in the face of incessant rebuffs and discouragements. Let us then picture Condorcet as surveying the terrific welter from the summer of 1789 to the summer of 1793, from the taking of the Bastille to the fall of the Girondins, with something of the firmness and self-possession of a Roman Cato.

After the flight of the king in June, and his return in what was virtually captivity to Paris, Condorcet was one of the party, very small in numbers and entirely discountenanced by public opinion, then

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* iii. 583. As this was written in 1777, Condorcet was perhaps thinking of Turgot and Necker. Of the latter, his daughter tells us repeatedly, without any consciousness that she is recording a most ignominious trait, that public approbation was the very breath of his nostrils, the thing for which he lived, the thing without which he was wretched.—See vol. i. of *Madame de Staël's Considerations*.

passing through the monarchical and constitutional stage, who boldly gave up the idea of a monarchy and proclaimed the idea of a republic. In July (1791) he published a piece strongly arguing for a negative answer to the question whether a king is necessary for the preservation of liberty.<sup>1</sup> In one sense, this composition is favourable to Condorcet's foresight; it was not every one who saw with him that the destruction of the monarchy was inevitable after the royal flight. This want of preparation in the public mind for every great change as it came, is one of the most striking circumstances of the Revolution, and it explains the violent, confused, and inadequate manner in which nearly every one of these changes was made. It was proposed at that time to appoint Condorcet to be governor to the young dauphin. But Condorcet in this piece took such pains to make his sentiments upon royalty known, that in the constitutional frame of mind in which the Assembly then was, the idea had to be abandoned. It was hardly likely that a man should be chosen for such an office, who had just declared the public will to be 'that the uselessness of a king, the needfulness of seeking means of displacing a power founded on illusions, should be one of the first truths offered to his reason; the obligation of concurring in this himself, one of the first of his

<sup>1</sup> (*Euv.* iii. 227. It was followed by a letter, nominally by a young mechanic, offering to construct an automaton sovereign, like Kempel's chess-player, who would answer all constitutional purposes perfectly.—*Ib.* 239-241.

moral duties; and the desire not to be freed from the yoke of law by an insulting inviolability, the first sentiment of his heart. People are well aware that at this moment the object is much less how to mould a king, than to teach him not to wish to be one.' As all France was then bent on the new constitution, a king included, Condorcet's republican assurance was hardly warranted, and it was by no means well received.

### III.

When the Constitution was accepted and the Legislative Assembly came to be chosen, Condorcet proved to have made so good an impression as a municipal officer, that the Parisians returned him for one of their deputies. The Declaration of Pillnitz in August 1791 had mitigated the loyalty that had even withstood the trial of the king's flight. When the Legislative Assembly met, it was found to contain an unmistakable element of republicanism of marked strength. Condorcet was chosen one of the secretaries, and he composed most of those multitudinous addresses in which this most unfortunate and least honoured of all parliamentary chambers tried to prove to the French people that it was actually in existence and at work. Condorcet was officially to the Legislative what Barère afterwards was to the Convention. But his addresses are turgid, labouring, and not effective for their purpose. They have neither the hard

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* xii. 226.

force of Napoleon's proclamations, nor the flowery eloquence of the Anacreon of the Guillotine. To compose such pieces well under such circumstances as those of the Assembly, a man must have much imagination and perhaps a slightly elastic conscience. Condorcet had neither one nor the other, but only reason—a hard anvil, out of which he laboriously struck flashes and single sounds.

Perhaps, after all, nobody else could have done better. The situation of the Assembly, between a hostile court and a suspicious and distrustful nation, and unable by its very nature to break the bonds, was from the beginning desperate. In December 1791 the Legislative through its secretary informs France of the frankness and loyalty of the king's measures in the face of the menaces of foreign war.<sup>1</sup> Within eight months, when the king's person was in captivity and his power suspended, the same secretary has to avow that from the very beginning the king had treated the Assembly with dissimulation, and had been in virtual league with the national enemies. The documents issued by the Assembly after the violent events of the Tenth of August 1792 are not edifying, and imply in Condorcet, who composed them, a certain want of eye for revolutionary methods. They mark the beginning of that short but most momentous period in the history of the Revolution, when formulas, as Mr. Carlyle says, had to be stretched out until they

<sup>1</sup> *Déclaration de l'Assemblée Nationale*, 29 Déc. 1791. *Œuvres* xii. 25.



cracked—a process truly called, ‘especially in times of swift change, one of the sorrowfullest tasks poor humanity has.’ You might read the *Exposition of the Motives from which the National Assembly have proclaimed the Convention, and suspended the Executive Power of the King*,<sup>1</sup> without dreaming that it is an account of a revolution which arose out of distrust or contempt for the Assembly, which had driven the king away from his palace and from power, and which had finally annihilated the very chamber that was thus professing to expound its motives for doing what the violence of Paris had really done in defiance of it. The power, in fact, was all outside the chamber, in Danton and the Commune. Under such circumstance it is of no interest to men to learn that ‘in the midst of these disasters the National Assembly, afflicted but calm, took its oath to maintain equality and liberty, or to die at its post; took the oath to save France, and looked about for means.’<sup>2</sup> Still more impotent and hollow, because still more pompous, is the address of six days later.<sup>3</sup> A few days after this, occurred the massacres of prisoners in September—scenes very nearly, if not quite, as bloody and iniquitous as those which attended the suppression of the rebellion in Ireland six years afterwards by English troops.

When the Convention was chosen, the electors of Paris rejected Condorcet. He was elected, however (Sept. 6), for the department of the Aisne, having

<sup>1</sup> 13th August 1792. *Œuv.* x. 547.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* x. 560.

<sup>3</sup> 19th August. *Ib.* x. 565.

among his colleagues in the deputation Tom Paine, and—a much more important personage—the youthful Saint-Just, who was so soon to stupefy the Convention by exclaiming, with mellow voice and face set immovable as bronze: ‘An individual has no right to be either virtuous or celebrated in your eyes. A free people and a national assembly are not made to admire anybody.’ The electors of the department of the Aisne had unconsciously sent two typical revolutionists: the man of intellectual ideas, and the man of passion heated as in the pit. In their persons the *Encyclopædia* and the Guillotine met. Condorcet, who had been extreme in the Legislative, but found himself a moderate in the Convention, gave wise counsel as to the true policy towards the new members: ‘Better try to moderate them than quarrel.’ But in this case, not even in their ruin, were fire and water reconciled.

On the first great question that the Convention had to decide—the fate of the king—Condorcet voted on the two main issues very much as a wise man would have voted, knowing the event as we know it. He voted that the king was guilty of conspiring against liberty, and he voted for the punishment of exile in preference to that of death. On the intermediate issue, whether the decision of the Convention should be final, or should be submitted to the people for ratification, he voted as a wise man should not have done, in favour of an appeal to the people. Such an appeal must inevitably have led to violent and bloody local struggles, and laid France open to the

enemy. It is a striking circumstance that, though Condorcet thus voted that the king was guilty, he had previously laid before the Convention a most careful argument to show that they were neither morally nor legally competent to try the king at all. Now, he asked, without violating every principle of jurisprudence, can you act at the same time as legislators constituting the crime, as accusers, and as judges? His proposal was that Louis XVI. should be tried by a tribunal whose jury and judges should be named by the electoral body of the departments.<sup>1</sup> With true respect for Condorcet's honourable anxiety that the conditions of justice should be rigorously observed—for, as he well said, 'there is no liberty in a country where positive law is not the single rule of judicial proceedings'—it is difficult to see why the Convention, coming as it did fresh from the electoral bodies, who must have had the question what was to be done with the imprisoned king foremost in their minds, why the members of the Convention should not form as legitimate a tribunal as any body whose composition and authority they had themselves defined and created, and which would be chosen by the very same persons who less than a month before had invested them with their own offices. Reading this most scrupulous and juristic composition, we might believe the writer to have forgotten that France lay mad and frenzied outside the hall where he stood, and that in

<sup>1</sup> *Opinion sur le Jugement de Louis XVI.* Nov. 1792. Œuv. xii. 287-303.

political action the question what is possible is at least as important as what is compatible with the maxims of scientific jurisprudence. It was to Condorcet's honour as a juriconsult that he should have had so many scruples; it is as much to his credit as a politician that he laid them aside and tried the king after all.

It is highly characteristic of Condorcet's tenacity of his own view of the Revolution and of its methods, that on the Saturday (January 19, 1793) when the king's fate was decided against Condorcet's conviction and against his vote—the execution taking place on the Monday morning—he should have appealed to the Convention, at all events to do their best to neutralise the effect of their verdict upon Europe, by instantly initiating a series of humane reforms in the law among them, including the abolition of the punishment of death. ‘The English ministers,’ he cried, ‘are now seeking to excite that nation against us. Do you suppose that they will venture to continue their calumnious declamations, when you can say to them: “We have abolished the penalty of death, while you still preserve it for the theft of a few shillings? You hand over debtors to the greed or spite of their creditors; our laws, wiser and more humane, know how to respect poverty and misfortune. Judge between us and you, and see to which of the two peoples the reproach of inhumanity may be addressed with most justice.”’<sup>1</sup> This was the eve of

<sup>1</sup> 19th Jan. 1793. *Œuv.* xii. 311.

the Terror. Well may Comte distinguish Condorcet as the one philosopher who pursued in the midst of the tempest his regenerating meditations.

But let us banish the notion that the history of the Convention is only the history of the guillotine. No chamber in the whole annals of governing assemblies ever displayed so much alertness, energy, and capacity, in the face of difficulties that might well have crushed them. Besides their efforts, justly held incomparable, to hurl back the enemy from the frontiers, they at once in the spirit of Condorcet's speech, made at so strange a season, set vigorously about the not less noble task of legal reforms and political reorganisation. The unrivalled ingenuity and fertility of the French character in all the arts of compact and geometric construction never showed itself so supreme. The civil code was drawn up in a month.<sup>1</sup> Constitutions abounded. Cynical historians laugh at the eagerness of the nation, during the months that followed the deposition of the king, to have a constitution; and, so far as they believed or hoped that a constitution would remedy all ills, their faith was assuredly not according to knowledge. It shows, however, the fundamental and seemingly ineradicable respect for authority which their history has engendered in the French, that even in this, their most chaotic hour, they craved order and its symbols.

Condorcet, along with Tom Paine, Sieyès, and

<sup>1</sup> See M. Edgar Quinet's remarks on this achievement. *La Révolution*, ii. 110.

others, was a member of the first committee for framing a constitution. They laboured assiduously from September to February 1793, when the project was laid upon the table, prefaced by an elaborate dissertation of Condorcet's composition.<sup>1</sup> The time was inauspicious. The animosities between the Girondins and the Mountain were becoming every day more furious and deadly. In the midst of this appalling storm of rage and hate and terror, Condorcet—at one moment wounding the Girondins by reproaches against their egotism and personalities, at another exasperating the Mountain by declaring of Robespierre that he had neither an idea in his head nor a feeling in his heart—still pertinaciously kept crying out for the acceptance of his constitution. It was of no avail. The revolution of the second of June came, and swept the Girondins out of the Chamber. Condorcet was not among them, but his political days were numbered. 'What did you do all that time?' somebody once asked of a member of the Convention, during the period which was now begin-

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* xii. 333, 417. M. Louis Blanc has contrasted the principles laid down as the basis of this project with Robespierre's rival Declaration of the Rights of Man, printing the two side by side in parallel columns. '*Les voilà donc face à face, après leur commune victoire sur le principe d'autorité, ces deux principes d'individualisme et de fraternité, entre lesquels, aujourd'hui même, le monde balance, invinciblement ému ! D'un côté la philosophie du rationalisme pur, qui divise ; d'un autre côté la philosophie du sentiment, qui rapproche et réunit. Ici Voltaire et Condorcet, là J. J. Rousseau et Robespierre.*' *Hist. de la Révol. Fran.* bk. ix. ch. v.

ning and which lasted until Thermidor in 1794. 'I lived,' was the reply. Condorcet was of another temper. He cared as little for his life as Danton or Saint-Just cared for theirs. Instead of cowering down among the men of the Plain or the frogs of the Marsh, he withstood the Mountain to the face.

Hérault de Séchelles, at the head of another committee, brought in a new constitution which was finally adopted and decreed (June 24, 1793). Of this, Siéyès said privately, that it was 'a bad table of contents.' Condorcet denounced it publicly, and, with a courage hardly excelled, he declared in so many words that the arrest of the Girondins had destroyed the integrity of the national representation. The Bill he handled with a severity that inflicted the keenest smarts on the self-love of its designers. A few days later, the Capucin Chabot, one of those weak and excitable natures that in ordinary times divert men by the intensity, multiplicity, and brevity of their enthusiasms, but to whom the fiercer air of such an event as the Revolution is a real poison, rose and in the name of the Committee of General Security called the attention of the Chamber to what he styled a sequel of the Girondist Brissot. This was no more nor less than Condorcet's document criticising the new constitution. 'This man,' said Chabot, 'has sought to raise the department of the Aisne against you, imagining that, because he has happened to sit by the side of a handful of *savants* of the Academy, it

is his duty to give laws to the French Republic.'<sup>1</sup> So a decree was passed putting Condorcet under arrest. His name was included in the list of those who were tried before the Revolutionary Tribunal on the Third of October for conspiring against the unity and indivisibility of the Republic. He was condemned in his absence, and declared to be *hors la loi*.

This, then, was the calamitous close of his aspirations from boyhood upwards to be permitted to partake in doing something for the common weal. He had still the work to perform by which posterity will best remember his name, though only a few months intervened between his flight and his most cruel end. When the decree against him was enacted he fled. Friends found a refuge for him in the house of a Madame Vernet, a widow in moderate circumstances, who let lodgings to students, and one of those beneficent characters that show us how high humanity can reach. 'Is he an honest and virtuous man?' she asked; 'in that case let him come, and lose not a moment. Even while we talk he may be seized.' The same night Condorcet intrusted his life to her keeping, and for nine months he remained in hiding under her roof. When he heard of the execution of the Girondins condemned on the same day with himself, he perceived the risk to which he was subjecting his protectress, and made up his mind to flee. 'I am an outlaw,' he said, 'and if I am discovered you will be dragged to the same death.' 'The Convention,'

<sup>1</sup> *Extrait du Moniteur. Œuv. xii. 677.*



Madame Vernet answered, with something of the heroism of more notable women of that time, 'I will put you out of the law; it has not the power to put you out of humanity. You stay.' This was the speech of the theatre. The whole household kept the most vigorous watch over the prisoner thus continuously detained, and for many months Madame Vernet's humane firmness was successful in preventing his escape. This time—his soul grievously harrowed by anxiety as to the fate of his wife and child, and by a restless eagerness not to compromise his benefactress, a bloody death staring him every moment in the face—Condorcet spent in the composition, without the aid of a single book, of his memorable work on the progress of the human mind. Among the many wonders of an epoch of portents, this feat of intellectual abstraction is not the least amazing.

When his task was accomplished, Condorcet set to work with more keenness than ever the deadly pain which his presence placed Madame Vernet. He was aware that to leave her house was to seek death, but he did not fear. He drew up a paper of directions to be given one day to his little daughter, when she should be of years to understand and follow them. They are written with minute care, and though tender and solicitous, they show perfect composure. His daughter is above all things to banish from her mind every revengeful sentiment against her father's enemies; to distrust her filial sensibility, and to make this sacrifice for her father's own sake. This done, he

marched downstairs, and having by an artful stratagem thrown Madame Vernet off her guard, he went out at ten o'clock in the morning imperfectly disguised into the street. This was the fifth of April 1794. By three in the afternoon, exhausted by fatigue which his strict confinement for nine months made excessive, he reached the house of a friend in the country, and prayed for a night's shelter. His presence excited less pity than alarm. The people gave him refreshment, and he borrowed a little pocket copy of Horace, with which he went forth into the loneliness of the night. He promised himself shelter amid the stone quarries of Clamart. What he suffered during this night, the whole day of the sixth of April, the night, and again the next day, there is no one to tell.

The door of the house in the Rue Servandoni was left on the latch night and day for a whole week. But Madame Vernet's generous hope was in vain; while she still hoped and watched, the end had come. On the evening of the seventh, Condorcet, with one of his legs torn or broken, his garments in rags, with visage gaunt and hunger-stricken, entered an inn in the hamlet of Clamart, and called for an omelette. Asked how many eggs he would have in it, the famishing man answered a dozen. Carpenters, for such he had given himself to be, do not have a dozen eggs in their omelettes. Suspicion was aroused, his hands were not the hands of a workman, and he had no papers to show, but only the pocket Horace. The

villagers seized him and hastened to drag him, bound hand and foot, to Bourg-la-Reine, then called for a season Bourg-l'Égalité. On the road he fainted, and they set him on a horse offered by a pitying wayfarer. When they reached the prison, Condorcet, starving, bleeding, way-worn, was flung into his cell. On the morrow, when the gaolers came to seek him, they found him stretched upon the ground, dead and stark. So he perished—of hunger and weariness, say some; of poison ever carried by him in a ring, say others.<sup>1</sup> So, to the last revolving supreme cares, this high spirit was overtaken by annihilation. His memory is left to us, the fruit of his ideas, and the impression of his character.

An eminent man, who escaped by one accident from the hatchets of the Septembriseurs, and by another from the guillotine of the Terror, while in hiding and in momentary expectation of capture and death, wrote thus in condemnation of suicide, 'the one crime which leaves no possibility of return to virtue.' 'Even at this incomprehensible moment'—the spring of 1793—'when morality, enlightenment, energetic love of country, only render death at the prison-wicket or on the scaffold more inevitable when it might be allowable to choose among the ways

<sup>1</sup> The Abbé Morellet, in his narrative of the death of Condorcet (*Mémoires*, c. xxiv.), says that he died of poison, a mixture of stramonium and opium. He adds that the surgeon described death as due to apoplexy. See Musset-Pathay's *J. J. Rousseau*, ii. 42.

of leaving a life that can no longer be preserved, and to rob tigers in human form of the accursed pleasure of dragging you forth and drinking your blood; yes, on the fatal tumbril itself, with nothing free but voice, I could still cry, *Take care*, to a child that should come too near the wheel: perhaps he may owe his life to me, perhaps the country shall one day owe its salvation to him.<sup>1</sup>

More than one career in those days, famous or obscure, was marked by this noble tenacity to lofty public ideas even in the final moments of existence. Its general acceptance as a binding duty, exorcising the mournful and insignificant egotisms that haunt and wearily fret and make waste the remnants of so many lives, will produce the profoundest of all possible improvements in men's knowledge of the sublime art of the happiness of their kind. The closing words of Condorcet's last composition show the solace which perseverance in taking thought for mankind brought to him in the depths of personal calamity. He had concluded his survey of the past history of the race, and had drawn what seemed in his eyes a moderate and reasonable picture of its future. 'How this picture,' he exclaims, with the knell of his own doom sounding full in the ear while he wrote, 'this picture of the human race freed from all its fetters, withdrawn from the empire of chance, as from that of the enemies of progress, and walking with firm and assured step in the way of truth, of

<sup>1</sup> Dupont de Nemours. *Les Physiocrates*, i. 326.

virtue, and happiness, presents to the philosopher a sight that consoles him for the errors, the crimes, the injustice, with which the earth is yet stained, and of which he is not seldom the victim! It is in the contemplation of this picture that he receives the reward of his efforts for the progress of reason, for the defence of liberty. He ventures to link them with the eternal chain of the destinies of man: it is there that he finds the true recompense of virtue, the pleasure of having done a lasting good. Fate can no longer undo it by any disastrous compensation that shall restore prejudice and bondage. This contemplation is for him a refuge, into which the recollection of his persecutors can never follow him; in which, living in thought with man reinstated in the rights and the dignity of his nature, he forgets man tormented and corrupted by greed, by base fear, by envy; it is here that he truly abides with his fellows, in an elysium that his reason has known how to create for itself, and that his love for humanity adorns with all purest delights.<sup>1</sup>

It has long been the fashion among the followers of that reaction which Coleridge led and Carlyle has spread and popularised, to dwell exclusively on the coldness and hardness, the excess of scepticism and the defect of enthusiasm, that are supposed to have characterised the eighteenth century. Because the official religion of the century both in England and France was lifeless and mechanical, it has been taken

<sup>1</sup> *Progrès de l'Esprit Humain.* Œuv. vi. 276.

for granted that the level of thought and feeling was a low one universally ; as if the highest moods of every era necessarily clothed themselves in religious forms. The truth is that, working in such natures as Condorcet's, the principles of the eighteenth century, its homage to reason and rational methods, its exaltation of the happiness of men, not excluding their material wellbeing, into the highest place, its passion for justice and law, its large illumination, all engendered a fervour as truly religious as that of Catholicism or of Calvinism at their best, while its sentiment was infinitely less interested and personal. The passage just quoted is as little mechanical, as little material, as the most rapturous ejaculations of the Christian saints and confessors. Read in connection with the circumstances of its composition, it may show that the eighteenth century was able at any rate to inspire its sons with a faith that could rob death of its sting and the grave of its victory, as effectually as if it had rested on a mystery instead of on reason, and been supported by the sanctions of eternal pain and eternal bliss, instead of moving from a confident devotion to humanity.

#### IV.

The shape of Condorcet's ideas upon history arose from the twofold necessity which his character imposed upon him, at once of appeasing his aspirations on behalf of mankind, and of satisfying a disciplined

and scientific intelligence. He was of too robust an understanding to find adequate gratification in the artificial construction of hypothetical utopias. Conviction was as indispensable as hope; and distinct grounds for the faith that was in him, as essential as the faith itself. The result of this fact of mental constitution, the intellectual conditions of the time being what they were, was the rise in his mind of the great and central conception of there being a law in the succession of social states, to be ascertained by an examination of the collective phenomena of past history. The merit of this admirable effort, and of the work in which it found expression, is very easily underrated, because the effort was insufficient and merely preparatory, while modern thought has already carried us far beyond it, and at least into sight of the more complete truths to which this effort only pointed the way. Let us remember, however, that it did point the way distinctly and unmistakably. A very brief survey of the state of history as a subject of systematic study enables us to appreciate with precision what service it was that Condorcet rendered; for it carries us back from the present comparatively advanced condition of the science of society to a time before his memorable attempt, when conceptions now become so familiar were not in existence, and when even the most instructed students of human affairs no more felt the need of a scientific theory of the manner in which social effects follow social causes, than the least instructed portion of the literary public feels

such a need in our own time. It is difficult after a subject has been separated from the nebulous mass of unclassified knowledge, after it has taken independent shape, and begun to move in lines of its own, to realise the process by which all this was effected, or the way in which before all this the facts concerned presented themselves to the thinker's mind. That we should overcome the difficulty is one of the conditions of our being able to do justice to the great army of the precursors.

Two movements of thought went on in France during the middle of the eighteenth century, which have been comparatively little dwelt upon by historians; their main anxiety has been to justify the foregone conclusion, so gratifying alike to the partisans of the social reaction and to the disciples of modern transcendentalism in its many disguises, that the eighteenth century was almost exclusively negative, critical, and destructive. Each of these two currents was positive in the highest degree, and their influence undeniably constructive, if we consider that it was from their union into a common channel, a work fully accomplished first in the mind of Condorcet, that the notion of the scientific treatment of history and society took its earliest start.

The first of the two movements, and that which has been most unaccountably neglected, consisted in the remarkable attempts of Quesnay and his immediate followers to withdraw the organisation of society from the sphere of empiricism, and to substitute for the



vulgar conception of arbitrary and artificial institutions as the sole foundation of this organisation, the idea that there is a certain Natural Order, conformity to which in all social arrangements is the essential condition of their being advantageous to the members of the social union. Natural Order in the minds of this school was no metaphysical figment evolved from uninstructed consciousness, but a set of circumstances to be discovered by continuous and methodical observation. It consisted of physical law and moral law. Physical law is the regulated course of every physical circumstance in the order evidently most advantageous to the human race. Moral law is the rule of every human action in the moral order, conformed to the physical order evidently most advantageous to the human race. This order is the base of the most perfect government, and the fundamental rule of all positive laws; for positive laws are only such laws as are required to keep up and maintain the natural order that is evidently most advantageous to the race.<sup>1</sup>

Towards the close of the reign of Lewis XIV. the frightful impoverishment of the realm attracted the attention of one or two enlightened observers, and among them of Boisguillebert and Vauban. They had exposed, the former of them with especial force and amplitude, the absurdity of the general system of administration, which seemed to have been devised for the express purpose of paralysing both agriculture and commerce, and exhausting all the sources of the

<sup>1</sup> Quesnay; *Droit Naturel*, ch. v. *Les Physiocrates*, 1. 52.

national wealth.<sup>1</sup> But these speculations had been mainly of a fiscal kind, and pointed not much further than to a readjustment of taxation and an improvement in the modes of its collection. The disciples of the New Science, as it was called, the Physiocrats, or believers in the supremacy of Natural Order, went much beyond this, and in theory sought to lay open the whole ground of the fabric of society. Practically they dealt with scarcely any but the economic circumstances of societies, though some of them mix up with their reasonings upon commerce and agriculture crude and incomplete hints upon forms of government and other questions that belong not to the economical but to the political side of social science.<sup>2</sup> Quesnay's famous *Maxims* open with a declaration in favour of the unity of the sovereign authority, and against the system of counterbalancing forces in government. Almost immediately he passes on to the ground of political economy, and elaborates the conditions of material prosperity in an agricultural realm. With the correctness of the definitions and principles of economic science as laid down by these writers, we have here nothing to do. Their peculiar distinction in the present connection is the grasp which they

<sup>1</sup> *Economistes Financiers du 18ième Siècle*. Vauban's *Projet d'une Dîme Royale* (p. 33), and Boisguillebert's *Pactum de la France*, etc. (p. 248 et seq.)

<sup>2</sup> De la Rivière, for instance, very notably. Cf. his *Ordre Naturel des Sociétés Politiques*. *Physiocrates*, II. 409, 436, etc. See also Baudeau on the superiority of the Economic Monarchy *Ib.* pp. 783-791.

had of the principle of there being a natural, and therefore a scientific, order in the conditions of a society; that order being natural in the sense that they attached to the term, which from the circumstances of the case is most beneficial to the race. From this point of view they approach some of the problems of what is now classified as social statics, and they assume, without any consciousness of another aspect being possible, that the society which they are discussing is in a state of equilibrium.

It is evident that with this restriction of the speculative horizon, they were and must remain wholly unable to emerge into the full light of the completely constituted science of society, with laws of movement as well as laws of equilibrium, with definite methods of interpreting past and predicting future states. They could account for and describe the genesis of the social union, as Plato and Aristotle had in different ways been able to do many centuries before; and they could prescribe some of the conditions of its being maintained in vigour and compactness. Some of them could even see in a vague way the interdependence of peoples and the community of the real interests of different nations, each nation, as De la Rivière expressed it, being only a province of the vast kingdom of nature, a branch from the same trunk as the rest.<sup>1</sup> What they could not see was the great fact of social evolution; and here too, in the succession of social states, there has been a natural

<sup>1</sup> *Ordre Nat. des Soc. Pol.* p. 528.

and observable order. In a word, they tried to understand society without the aid of history. Consequently they laid down the truths which they discovered as absolute and fixed, when they were no more than conditional and relative.

Fortunately inquirers in another field had set a movement afoot, which was destined to furnish the supplement of their own speculation. This was the remarkable development of the conception of history, which Montesquieu's two memorable books first made conspicuous. Bossuet's well-known discourse on universal history, teeming as it does with religious prejudice, just as Condorcet's sketch teems with prejudice against religion, and egregiously imperfect in execution as it must be pronounced when judged from even the meaneast historical standard, had perhaps partially introduced the spirit of Universality, as Comte says, into the study of history. But it was impossible from the nature of the case for any theologian to know fully what this spirit means; and it was not until the very middle of the following century that any effective approach was made to that universality which Bossuet did little more than talk about. Then it came not from theology, but from the much more hopeful sources of a rational philosophy. Before Montesquieu no single stone of the foundation of scientific history can be said to have been laid. Of course, far earlier writers had sought after the circumstances which brought about a given transaction. Thucydides, for example, had attributed the

cause of the Peloponnesian war to the alarm of the Lacedæmonians at the greatness of the power of Athens.<sup>1</sup> It is this sense of the need of explanation, however rudimentary it may be, which distinguishes the great historian from the chronicler, even from a very superior chronicler like Livy, who in his account of even so great an event as the Second Punic War plunges straightway into narrative of what happened, without concerning himself why it happened. Tacitus had begun his *Histories* with remarks upon the condition of Rome, the feeling of the various armies, the attitude of the provinces, so that, as he says, '*non modo casus eventusque rerum, qui plerumque fortuiti sunt, sed ratio etiam causæque noscantur.*'<sup>2</sup> But these and the like instances in historical literature were only political explanations, more or less adequate, of particular transactions; they were no more than the sagacious remarks of men with statesmanlike minds, upon the origin of some single set of circumstances.

The rise from this to the high degree of generality which marks the speculations of Montesquieu, empirical as they are, was as great as the rise from the mere maxims of worldly wisdom to the widest principles of ethical philosophy. Polybius, indeed, in the remarkable chapters with which his *Histories* open, uses expressions that are so modern as almost to startle us. 'People who study history,' he says, 'in separate and detached portions, without reference to one another, and suppose that from them they acquire a knowledge

<sup>1</sup> Bk. i. 28.

<sup>2</sup> *Hist.* i. 4.

of the whole, are like a man who in looking on the severed members of what had once been an animated and comely creature, should think that this was enough to give him an idea of its beauty and force when alive. The empire of Rome was what by its extent in Italy, Africa, Asia, Greece, brought history into the condition of being organic (*συνωμοειδής*).<sup>1</sup> His object was to examine the general and collective ordering of events; when it came into existence; whence it had its source; how it had this special completion and fulfilment—the universal empire of Rome.<sup>1</sup> Striking as this is, and admirable as it is, there is not in it any real trace of the abstract conception of social history. Polybius recognises the unity of history, so far as that could be understood in the second century before Christ, but he treats his subject in the concrete, describing the chain of events, but not attempting to seek their law. It was Montesquieu who first applied the comparative method to social institutions; who first considered physical conditions in connection with the laws of a country; who first perceived and illustrated how that natural order which the Physiocrats only considered in relation to the phenomena of wealth and its production, really extended over its political phenomena as well; who first set the example of viewing a great number of social facts all over the world in groups and classes; and who first definitely and systematically inquired into the causes of a set of complex historical events

<sup>1</sup> Polyb. *Hist.* I. III. 4; iv. 8, 7.

and institutions, as being both discoverable and intelligible. This was a very marked advance upon both of the ideas, by one or other of which men had previously been content to explain to themselves the course of circumstances in the world; either the inscrutable decrees of an inhuman providence, or the fortuitous vagaries of an eyeless destiny.

It was Turgot, however, who completed the historical conception of Montesquieu, in a piece written in 1750, two years after the appearance of the *Esprit des Lois*, and in one or two other fragmentary compositions of about the same time, which are not the less remarkable because the writer was only twenty-three years old when these advanced ideas presented themselves to his intelligence. Vico in Italy had insisted on the doctrine that the course of human affairs is in a cycle, and that they move in a constant and self-repeating orbit.<sup>1</sup> Turgot, on the contrary, with more wisdom, at the opening of his subject is careful to distinguish the ever-varying spectacle of the succession of men from generation to generation, from the circle of identical revolutions in which the phenomena of nature are enclosed. In the one case time only restores at each instant the image of what it has just caused to disappear; in the other, the reason and the passions are ever incessantly

<sup>1</sup> The well-known words of Thucydides may contain the germ of the same idea, when he speaks of the future as being likely to represent again, after the fashion of human things, 'if not the very image, yet the near resemblance of the past.' *Iliad* i. 22, 4.

producing new events. 'All the ages are linked together by a succession of causes and effects which bind the state of the world to all the states that have gone before. The multiplied signs of speech and writing, in supplying men with the means of an assured possession of their thoughts and of communicating them to one another, have formed a common treasure that one generation transmits to another, as an inheritance constantly augmented by the discoveries of each generation; and the human race, looked at from its origin, appears in the eyes of the philosopher one immense whole, which, just as in the case of each individual, has its infancy and its growth.<sup>1</sup>

Pascal and others in ancient and modern times<sup>2</sup> had compared in casual and unfruitful remarks the history of the race to the history of the individual, but Turgot was able in some sort to see the full meaning and extent of the analogy, as well as the limitations proper to it, and to draw from it some of the larger principles which the idea involved. The first proposition in the passage just quoted, that a chain of causes and effects unites each age with every other age that has gone before, is one of the most memorable sentences in the history of thought. And Turgot not only saw that there is a relation of cause and effect between successive states of society; he

<sup>1</sup> *Discours en Sorbonne. Œuv. de Turgot*, ii. 597. (Ed. of 1844).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Sir G. C. Lewis's *Methods of Observation in Politics*, ii. 489, note.



had glimpses into some of the conditions of the relation. To a generation that stands on lofty heights his attempts seem rudimentary and strangely simple, but it was these attempts which cut the steps for our ascent. How is it, he asked, for instance, that the succession of social states is not uniform, that they follow with unequal step along the track marked out for them? He found the answer in the inequality of natural advantages, and he was able to discern the necessity of including in these advantages the presence, apparently accidental, in some communities and not in others of men of especial genius or capacity in some important direction.<sup>1</sup> Again, he saw that just as in one way natural advantages accelerate the progress of a society, in another natural obstacles also accelerate it, by stimulating men to the efforts necessary to overcome them: *le besoin perfectionne l'instrument*.<sup>2</sup> The importance of following the march of the human mind over all the grooves along which it travels to further knowledge, was fully present to him, and he dwells repeatedly on the constant play going on between discoveries in one science and those in another. In no writer is there a fuller and more distinct sense of the essential unity and integrity of the history of mankind, nor of the multitude of the mansions into which this vast house is divided, and the many keys which he must possess that would open and enter in.

Even in empirical explanations Turgot shows

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres de Turgot*, II. 599, 646, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* II. 601.

breadth and accuracy of vision truly surprising, considering his own youth and what we may venture to call the youth of his subject. The reader will be able to appreciate this, and to discern at the same time the arbitrary nature of Montesquieu's method, if he will contrast, for example, the remarks of this writer upon polygamy with the far wider and more sagacious explanation of the circumstances of such an institution given by Turgot.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, he has left us only short and fragmentary pieces, but they suggest more than many large and complete works. That they had a very powerful and direct influence upon Condorcet there is no doubt, as well from the similarity of general conception between him and Turgot, as from the nearly perfect identity of leading passages in their writings. Let us add that in Turgot's fragments we have what is unhappily not a characteristic of Condorcet, the peculiar satisfaction and delight in scientific history of a style which states a fact in such phrases as serve also to reveal its origin, bearings, significance, in which every successive piece of description is so worded as to be self-evidently a link in the chain of explanation, an ordered term in a series of social conditions.

Before returning to Condorcet we ought to glance at the remarkable piece, written in 1784, in which

<sup>1</sup> *Esprit des Loix*, xvi. cc. 2-4. And *Discours sur l'Histoire universelle*, in Turgot's Works, II. 640, 641. For a further point of Turgot's speculations, see article "Turgot" in the present volume.

Kant propounded his idea of a universal or cosmopolitical history, which contemplating the agency of the human will upon a large scale should unfold to our view a regular stream of tendency in the great succession of events.<sup>1</sup> The will metaphysically considered, Kant said, is free, but its manifestations, that is to say, human actions, 'are as much under the control of universal laws of nature as any other physical phenomena.'

The very same course of incidents, which taken separately and individually would have seemed perplexed and incoherent, 'yet viewed in their connection and as the action of the human *species* and not of independent beings, never fail to observe a steady and continuous, though slow, development of certain great predispositions in our nature.' As it is impossible to presume in the human race any *rational* purpose of its own, we must seek to observe some *natural* purpose in the current of human actions. Thus a history of creatures with no plan of their own, may yet admit a systematic form as a history of creatures blindly pursuing a plan of nature. Now we know that all predispositions are destined to develop themselves according to their final purpose. Man's rational predispositions are destined to develop themselves in the species and not in the individual. History then is the progress of the development of all the

<sup>1</sup> *Idea of a Universal History on a Cosmo-Political Plan.* It was translated by De Quincy, and is to be found in vol. xiii. of his collected works, pp. 193-152.

tendencies laid in man by nature. The method of development is the antagonism of these tendencies in the social state, and its source the *unsocial sociability* of man—a tendency to enter the social state, combined with a perpetual resistance to that tendency, which is ever threatening to dissolve it. The play of these two tendencies unfolds talents of every kind, and by gradual increase of light a preparation is made for such a mode of thinking as is capable of ‘exalting a social concert that had been *pathologically* extorted from the mere necessities of situation, into a *moral* union founded on the reasonable choice.’ Hence the highest problem for man is the establishment of a universal civil society, founded on the empire of political justice; and ‘the history of the human species as a whole may be regarded as the unravelling of a hidden plan of nature for accomplishing a perfect state of civil constitution for society in its internal relations (and, as the condition of that, in its external relations also), as the sole state of society in which the tendencies of human nature can be all and fully developed.’ Nor is this all. We shall not only be able to unravel the intricate web of past affairs, but shall also find a clue for the guidance of future statesmen in the art of political prediction. Nay more, this clue ‘will open a consolatory prospect into futurity, in which at a remote distance we shall observe the human species seated upon an eminence won by infinite toil, where all the germs are unfolded which nature has implanted

within it, and its destination on this earth accomplished.'

That this conception involves an assumption about tendencies and final purposes which reverses the true method of history, and moreover reduces what ought to be a scientific inquiry to be a foregone justification of nature or providence, should not prevent us from appreciating its signal merits in insisting on a systematic presentation of the collective activity of the race, and in pointing out, however cursorily, the use of such an elucidation of the past in furnishing the grounds of practical guidance in dealing with the future and in preparing it. Considering the brevity of this little tract, its pregnancy and suggestiveness have not often been equalled. We have seen enough of it here to enable us to realise the differences between this and the French school. We miss the wholesome objectivity, resulting from the stage which had been reached in France by the physical sciences. Condorcet's series of *éloges* shows unmistakably how deep an impression the history of physical discovery had made upon him, and how clearly he understood the value of its methods. The peculiar study which their composition had occasioned him is of itself almost enough to account for the fact that a conception which had long been preparing in the superior minds of the time, should fully develop itself in him rather than in anybody else.

## V.

The Physiocrats, as we have seen, had introduced the idea of there being a natural order in social circumstances, that order being natural which is most advantageous to mankind. Turgot had declared that one age is bound to another by a chain of causation. Condorcet fused these two conceptions. He viewed the history of the ages as a whole, and found in their succession a natural order; an order which, when uninterrupted and undisturbed, tended to accumulate untold advantages upon the human race, which was every day becoming more plain to the vision of men, and therefore every day more and more assured from disturbance by ignorant prejudice and sinister interests. There is an order at once among the circumstances of a given generation, and among the successive sets of circumstances of successive generations. 'If we consider the development of human faculties in its results, so far as they relate to the individuals who exist at the same time on a given space, and if we follow that development from generation to generation, then we have before us the picture of the progress of the human mind. This progress is subject to the same general laws that are to be observed in the development of the faculties of individuals, for it is the result of that development, considered at the same time in a great number of individuals united in society. But the result that presents itself at any one instant depends upon that

which was offered by the instants present, it influences the result in times still to come.

This picture will be of a historical character, much as being subject to perpetual variation, formed by the observation in due order of human societies in different epochs that they have passed. It will expose the various changes, the influence exercised by each period over the next, and thus will of modifications impressed upon the race, and itself in the immensity of the ages, the progress has followed, and the exact steps that it has taken towards truth and happiness. Such a picture will show what man has been and of what he is, will point out the means proper for assuring and accelerating his fresh progress that his nature allows us to expect still further.<sup>1</sup>

'If a man is able to predict with nearly perfect confidence, phenomena with whose laws he is acquainted, if, even when they are unknown to him, he can judge in accordance with the experience of the past, and foresee with a large degree of probability the events of the future, why should we treat it as an impossible enterprise, to trace with some verisimilitude a picture of the future destinies of the human race in accordance with the results of its history? This is the foundation of belief in the natural sciences, and it is that the general laws, known or unknown, which regulate the phenomena of the universe are not unchangeable.'

<sup>1</sup> *Tableau des Progrès de l'Esprit Humain.* Chap. vi. § 2.

constant; and why should this principle be less true for the development of the moral and intellectual faculties of man than for other natural operations? In short, opinions grounded on past experience in objects of the same order being the single rule of conduct for even the wisest men, why should the philosopher be forbidden to rest his conjectures on the same base, provided that he never attributes to them a degree of certainty beyond what is warranted by the number the constancy, and the accuracy of his observations?<sup>1</sup>

Thus Condorcet's purpose was not to justify nature, as it had been with Kant, but to search in the past for rational grounds of a belief in the unbounded splendour of men's future destinies. His view of the character of the relations among the circumstances of the social union, either at a given moment or in a succession of periods, was both accurate and far-sighted. When he came actually to execute his own great idea, and to specify the manner in which those relations arose and operated, he instantly diverged from the right path. Progress in his mind is exclusively produced by improvement in intelligence. It is the necessary result of man's activity in the face of that disproportion ever existing between what he knows and what he desires and feels the necessity to know.<sup>2</sup> Hence the most fatal of the errors of Condorcet's sketch. He measures only the contributions made by nations and eras to what we know; leaving out of sight their failures and successes in the eleva-

<sup>1</sup> *Env.* vi. 286.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* vi. 21.



tion of moral standards and ideals, and in the purification of human passions.

Now even if we hold the intellectual principle only to be progressive, and the moral elements to be fixed, being coloured and shaped and quickened by the surrounding intellectual conditions, still, inasmuch as the manner of this shaping and colouring is continually changing and leading to the most important transformations of human activity and sentiment, it must obviously be a radical deficiency in any picture of social progress to leave out the development of ethics, whether it be a derivative or an independent and spontaneous development. One seeks in vain in Condorcet's sketch for any account of the natural history of western morals, or for any sign of consciousness on his part that the difference in ethical discipline and feeling between the most ferocious of primitive tribes and the most enlightened eighteenth-century Frenchmen, was a result of evolution that needed historical explanation, quite as much as the difference between the astrolatry of one age and the astronomy of another. We find no recognition of the propriety of recounting the various steps of that long process by which, to use Kant's pregnant phrase, the relations born of pathological necessity were metamorphosed into those of moral union. The grave and lofty feeling, for example, which inspired the last words of the *Tableaux*—whence came it? Of what long-drawn chain of causes in the past was it the last effect? It is not enough to refer us generally to previous advances in

knowledge and intellectual emancipation, because even supposing the successive modifications of our moral sensibilities to be fundamentally due to the progress of intellectual enlightenment, we still want to know in the first place something about the influences which harness one process to the other, and in the second place, something about the particular directions which these modifications of moral constitution have taken.

If this is one very radical omission in Condorcet's scheme, his angry and vehement aversion for the various religions of the world (with perhaps one exception) is a sin of commission still more damaging to its completeness. That he should detest the corrupt and oppressive forms of religion of his own century was neither surprising nor blamable. An unfavourable view of the influences upon human development of the Christian belief, even in its least corrupt forms, was not by any means untenable. Nay, he was at liberty to go further than this, and to depict religion as a natural infirmity of the human mind in its immature stages, just as there are specific disorders incident in childhood to the human body. Even on this theory, he was bound to handle it with the same calmness which he would have expected to find in a pathological treatise by a physician. Who would write of the sweating sickness with indignation, or describe zymotic diseases with resentment? Condorcet's pertinacious anger against theology is just as irrational as this would be, from the scientific point of view which he pretends to have assumed. Theology.

in fact, was partly avenged of her assailants, for she had in the struggle contrived to infect them with the bitter contagion of her own traditional spirit.

From the earliest times to the latest it is all one story according to Condorcet. He can speak with respect of philosophies even when, as in the case of the Scotch school of the last century, he dislikes and condemns them.<sup>1</sup> Of religion his contempt and hatred only vary slightly in degree. Barbarous tribes have sorcerers, trading on the gross superstitions of their dupes: so in other guise and with different names have civilised nations to-day. As other arts progressed, superstition, too, became less rude; priestly families kept all knowledge in their own hands, and thus preserved their hypocritical and tyrannical assumptions from detection. They disclosed nothing to the people without some supernatural admixture, the better to maintain their personal pretensions. They had two doctrines, one for themselves, and the other for the people. Sometimes, as they were divided into several orders, each of them reserved to itself certain mysteries. Thus all the inferior orders were at once rogues and dupes, and the great system of hypocrisy was only known in all its completeness to a few adepts. Christianity belonged to the same class. Its priests, we must admit, 'in spite of their knaveries and their vices, were enthusiasts ready to perish for their doctrines.' In vain did Julian endeavour to deliver the empire from the scourge. Its triumph was the

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* vi. 186.

signal for the incurable decay of all art and knowledge. The Church may seem to have done some good in things where her interests did not happen to clash with the interests of Europe, as in helping to abolish slavery, for instance; but after all 'circumstances and manners' would have produced the result necessarily and of themselves. Morality, which was taught by the priests only, contained those universal principles that have been unknown to no sect; but it created a host of purely religious duties, and of imaginary sins. These duties were more rigorously enjoined than those of nature, and actions that were indifferent, legitimate, or even virtuous, were more severely rebuked and punished than real crimes. Yet, on the other hand, a moment of repentance, consecrated by the absolution of a priest, opened the gates of heaven to the worst miscreants.<sup>1</sup>

In the opening of the last of these remarks there is much justice. So there is in the striking suggestion made in another place, that we should not bless erroneous systems for their utility, simply because they help to repair some small part of the mischief of which they have themselves been the principal cause.<sup>2</sup> But on the whole it is obvious that Condorcet was unfitted by his temper, and that of the school to which he most belonged, from accepting religion as a

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* vi. pp. 85, 55, 101, 102, 111, 117, 118, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Dissertation sur cette question: S'il est utile aux hommes d'être trompés?*—one of the best of Condorcet's writings. *Œuv.* v. 360.

fact in the history of the human mind that must have some positive explanation. To look at it in this way as the creation of a handful of selfish impostors in each community, was to show a radical incompetence to carry out the scheme which had been so scientifically projected. The picture is ruined by the angry caricature of what ought to have been one of the most important figures in it. To this place the Christian Church is undeniably entitled, however we may be disposed to strike the balance between the undoubted injuries and the undoubted advantages which it has been the means of dealing to the civilisation of the west. Never perhaps was there so thorough an inversion of the true view of the comparative elevation of different parts of human character, as is implied in Condorcet's strange hint that Cromwell's satellites would have been much better men if they had carried instead of the Bible at their saddle-bow some merry book of the stamp of Voltaire's *Pucelle*.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the misreading of history in explaining religion by the folly of the many and the fraud of a few, Condorcet's interpretation involved the profoundest infidelity to his own doctrine of the intrinsic purity and exaltation of human nature. The doctrine ought in all reason to have led him to look for the secret of the popular acceptance of belief that to him seemed most outrageous, in some part

<sup>1</sup> See Condorcet's vindication of the *Pucelle* in his *Life* of Voltaire. *Œuv.* iv. 88, 89. See also Comte's *Phil.* p. v. 450.

sibly finer side which they might possess for others, appealing not to the lower but to the higher qualities of a nature with instincts of perfection. Take his account of Purgatory, for instance. The priests, he says, drew up so minute and comprehensive a table of sins that nobody could hope to escape from censure. Here you come upon one of the most lucrative branches of the sacerdotal trafficking; people were taught to imagine a hell of limited duration, which the priests only had the power to abridge; and this grace they sold, first to the living, then to the kinsmen and friends of the dead.<sup>1</sup> Now it was surely more worthy of a belief in the natural depravity than in the natural perfectibility of the sons of Adam, thus to assume without parley or proviso a base mercenariness on the one hand, and grovelling terror on the other, as the origin of a doctrine which was obviously susceptible of a kinder explanation. Would it not have been more consistent with belief in human goodness to refer the doctrine to a merciful and affectionate and truly humanising anxiety to assuage the horrors of what is perhaps the most frightful idea that has ever corroded human character, the idea of eternal punishment? We could in part have pardoned Condorcet if he had striven to invent ever so fanciful origins for opinions and belief in his dictitude for the credit of humanity. As it is, he distorts the history of religion only to humanity's discredit. How, if the people were always predis-

<sup>1</sup> *Ess.* vi. 118.

posed to virtue, were priests, sprung of the same people and bred in the same traditions, so invariably and incurably devoted to baseness and hypocrisy? Was the nature of a priest absolutely devoid of what physicians call recuperative force, restoring him to a sound mind, in spite of professional perversion? In fine, if man had been so grossly enslaved in moral nature from the beginning of the world down to the year 1789 or thereabouts, how was it possible that notwithstanding the admitted slowness of civilising processes, he should suddenly spring forth the very perfectible and nearly perfected being that Condorcet passionately imagined him to be? <sup>1</sup>

It has already been hinted that there was one partial exception to Condorcet's otherwise all-embracing animosity against religion. This was Mahometanism. Towards this his attitude is fully appreciative, though of course he deplores the superstitions which mixed themselves up with the Arabian prophet's efforts for the purification of the men of his nation. After the seven vials of fiery wrath have been poured out upon the creed of Palestine, it is refreshing to find

<sup>1</sup> As M. Comte says in his remarks on Condorcet (*Phil. Pos.* iv. 185-193): '*Le progrès total finalement accompli ne peut être sans doute que le résultat général de l'accumulation spontanée des divers progrès partiels successivement réalisés depuis l'origine de la civilisation, en vertu de la marche successivement lente et graduelle de la nature humaine;*' so that Condorcet's picture presents a standing miracle, '*où l'on s'est même interdit d'abord la ressource vulgaire de la Providence.*' Comte's criticism, however, seems to leave out of sight what full justice Condorcet did to the various partial advances in the intellectual order.

the creed of Arabia almost patronised and praised. The writer who could not have found in his heart to think Gregory the Great or Hildebrand other than a mercenary impostor, nor Cromwell other than an ambitious hypocrite, admits with exquisite blandness of Mahomet that he had the art of employing all the means of subjugating men *avec adresse, mais avec grandeur*.<sup>1</sup> Another reason, no doubt, besides his hatred of the Church, lay at the bottom of Condorcet's tolerance or more towards Mahometanism. The Arabian superstition was not fatal to knowledge; Arabian activity in algebra, chemistry, optics, and astronomy, atoned in Condorcet's eyes for the Koran.

It is fair to add further, that Condorcet showed a more just appreciation of the effects of Protestantism upon western development than has been common among French thinkers. He recognises that men who had learnt, however imperfectly, to submit their religious prejudices to rational examination, would naturally be likely to extend the process to political prejudices also. Moreover, if the reformed churches refused to render to reason all its rights, still they agreed that its prison should be less narrow; the chain was not broken, but it ceased to be either so heavy or so short as it had been. And in countries where what was by the dominant sect insolently styled tolerance succeeded in establishing itself, it was possible to maintain the tolerated doctrines with a more or less complete freedom. So there arose in

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres*, vi. 120-123.



Europe a sort of freedom of thought, not for men but for Christians; and, 'if we except France, it is only for Christians that it exists anywhere else at the present day,' a limitation which has now fortunately ceased to be altogether exact.

If we have smiled at the ease with which what is rank craftiness in a Christian is toned down into address in a Mahometan, we may be amused too at the leniency that describes some of the propagandist methods of the eighteenth century. Condorcet becomes rapturous as he tells in a paragraph of the sustention with what admixture of the wisdom of the serpent the humane philosophers of his century 'covered the truth with a veil that prevented it from hurting too weak sight, and left the pleasure of conjecturing it; caressing prejudices with address to deal them the more certain blows; scarcely ever threatening them, nor ever more than one at once, nor even one in its integrity; sometimes conciliating the enemies of reason by pretending to desire no more than a half-tolerance in religion and half-liberty in politics; conciliating despotism while they combated the absurdities of religion, and religion when they rose against despotism; attacking these two scourges in their principle, even when they seemed only to bear ill-will to revolting or ridiculous abuses, and striking these poisonous trees in their very roots, while they appeared to be doing no more than pruning crooked branches.'<sup>2</sup> Imagine the holy rage with

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* vi. 149, 153.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* 187-189.

which such acts would have been attacked, if Condorcet had happened to be writing about the Jesuits. Alas! the stern and serene composure of the historical conscience was as unknown to him as it is always to orthodox apologists. It is to be said, moreover, that he had less excuse for being without it, for he rested on the goodness of men, and not, as theologians rest, on their vileness. It is a most interesting thing, we may notice in passing, to consider what was the effect upon the Revolution of this artfulness or prudence with which its theoretic precursors sowed the seed. Was it as truly wise as Condorcet supposed? Or did it weaken, almost corrupt, the very roots? Was it the secret of the thoroughness with which the work of demolition was done? Was it, too, the secret of the many and disastrous failures in the task of reconstruction?<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is worth while to quote on this subject a passage from Condorcet as historically instructive as it is morally dangerous. '*La nécessité de mentir pour désavouer un ouvrage est une extrémité qui répugne également à la conscience et à la noblesse du caractère; mais le crime est pour les hommes injustes qui rendent ce désaveu nécessaire à la sûreté de celui qu'ils y forcent. Si vous avez érigé en crime ce qui n'en est pas un, si vous avez porté atteinte, par des lois absurdes ou par des lois arbitraires, au droit naturel qu'ont tous les hommes, non seulement d'avoir une opinion, mais de la rendre publique, alors vous méritez de perdre celui qu'a chaque homme d'entendre la vérité de la bouche d'un autre, droit qui fonde seul l'obligation rigoureuse de ne pas mentir. S'il n'est pas permis de tromper, c'est parceque tromper quelqu'un, c'est lui faire un tort, ou s'exposer à lui en faire un; mais le tort suppose un droit, et personne n'a celui de chercher, à s'assurer les moyens de commettre une injustice.*' *Vie de Voltaire; Œuv.* iv. 33, 34. Condorcet

There are one or two detached remarks suggested by Condorcet's picture, which it may be worth while to make. He is fully alive, for example, to the importance to mankind of the appearance among them of one of those men of creative genius, like Archimedes or like Newton, whose lives constitute an epoch in human history. Their very existence he saw to be among the greatest benefits conferred on the race by Nature. He hardly seems to have been struck, on the other hand, with the appalling and incessant waste of these benefits that goes on ; with the number of men of Newtonian capacity who are undoubtedly born into the world only to chronicle small beer ; with the hosts of high and worthy souls who labour and flit away like shadows, perishing in the accomplishment of minor and subordinate ends. We may suspect that the notion of all this immeasurable profusion of priceless treasures, its position as one of the laws of the condition of man on the globe, would be unspeakably hard of endurance to one holding Condorcet's peculiar form of optimism.

Again, if we had space, it would be worth while to examine some of the acute and ingenious hints which Condorcet throws out by the way. It would be interesting to consider, as he suggests, the influence

might have found some countenance for his sophisms in Plato (*Republ.* ii. 383) ; but even Plato restricted the privilege of lying to statesmen (iii. 389). He was in a wiser mood when he declared (*Euv.* v. 384) that it is better to be imprudent than a hypocrite,—though for that matter these are hardly the only alternatives.

upon the progress of the human mind of the change from writing on such subjects as science, philosophy, and jurisprudence in Latin, to the usual language of each country. That change rendered the sciences more popular, but it increased the trouble of the scientific men in following the general march of knowledge. It caused a book to be read in one country by more men of inferior competence, but less read throughout Europe by men of superior light. And though it relieves men who have no leisure for extensive study from the trouble of learning Latin, it imposes upon profounder persons the necessity of learning a variety of modern languages.<sup>1</sup> Again, ground is broken for the most important reflection, in the remark that men preserve the prejudices of their childhood, their country, and their age, long after they have recognised all the truths necessary to destroy them.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps most instructive and most tranquillising of all is this, that the progress of physical knowledge is constantly destroying in silence erroneous opinions which had never seemed to be attacked.<sup>3</sup> And in reading history, how much ignorance and misinterpretation would have been avoided, if the student had but been careful to remember that 'the law as written and the law as administered; the principles of those in power, and the modification of their action by the sentiments of the governed; an institution as it emanates from those who form it, and the same institution realised; the religion of books,

<sup>1</sup> *Opus.* vi. 108.<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* vi. 22.<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* p. 220.

and that of the people; the apparent universality of a prejudice, and the substantial adhesion that it receives; these may all differ in such a way that the effects absolutely cease to answer to the public and recognised causes.<sup>1</sup>

## VI.

We have now seen something of Condorcet's ideas of the past, and of his conception of what he was perhaps the first to call the Science of Man. Let us turn to his hopes for the future, and one or two of the details to which his study of the science of man conducted him. It is well to perceive at the outset that Condorcet's views of the Tenth Epoch, as he counts the period extending from the French Revolution to the era of the indefinite perfection of man, were in truth not the result of any scientific processes whatever, properly so called. He saw, and this is his merit, that such processes were applicable to the affairs of society; and that, as he put it, all political and moral errors rest upon error in philosophy, which in turn is bound up with erroneous methods in physical science.<sup>2</sup> But in the execution of his plan he does not succeed in showing the nature of the relations of these connected forces; still less does he practise the scientific duty, for illustrating which he gives such well-deserved glory to Newton,<sup>3</sup> of not only accounting for phenomena, but also of measuring the quantities

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 284.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* p. 223.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* p. 200.

of forces. His conception, therefore, of future progress, however near conjecture may possibly have brought him to the truth, is yet no more than conjecture. The root of it is found in nothing more precise, definite, or quantified than a general notion gathered from history, that some portions of the race had made perceptible advances in freedom and enlightenment, and that we might therefore confidently expect still further advances to be made in the same direction with an accelerated rapidity, and with certain advantageous effects upon the happiness of the whole mass of the human race. In short, the end of the speculation is a confirmed and heightened conviction of the indefinite perfectibility of the species, with certain foreshadowings of the direction which this perfectibility would ultimately follow. The same rebellion against the disorder and misery of the century, which drove some thinkers and politicians into fierce yearnings for an imaginary state of nature, and others into an extravagant admiration for the ancient republics, caused a third school, and Condorcet among them, to turn their eyes with equally boundless confidence and yearning towards an imaginary future. It was at all events the least desperate error of the three.

Our expectations for the future, Condorcet held, may be reduced to these three points: the destruction of inequality among nations; the progress of equality among the people of any given nation; and, finally the substantial perfecting (*perfectionnement réel*) of man.

I. With reference to the first of these great operations, it will be brought about by the abandonment by European peoples of their commercial monopolies, their treacherous practices, their mischievous and extravagant proselytising, and their sanguinary contempt for those of another colour or another creed. Vast countries, now a prey to barbarism and violence, will present in one region numerous populations waiting to receive the means and instruments of civilisation from us, and as soon as they find brothers in the Europeans, will joyfully become their friends and pupils; and in another region, nations crushed under the yoke of despots or conquerors, crying aloud for so many ages for liberators. In yet other regions it is true, there are tribes almost savage, cut off by the harshness of their climate from a perfected civilisation, or else conquering hordes, ignorant of every law but violence and every trade but brigandage. The progress of these last two descriptions of people will naturally be more tardy, and attended by more storm and convulsion. It is possible even, that reduced in number, in proportion as they see themselves repulsed by civilised nations, they will end by insensibly disappearing.<sup>1</sup> It is perhaps a little too soon to expect Esquimaux or the barbaric marauders of the sandy expanses of Central Asia insensibly to disappear, lest by their cheerless presence they should destroy the unity and harmony of the transformation scene in the great drama of Perfectibility.

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* pp. 239-244.

II. The principal causes of the inequality that unfortunately exists among the people of the same community are three in number:—inequality in wealth; inequality of condition between the man whose means of subsistence are both assured and transmissible, and him for whom these means depend upon the duration of his working life; thirdly, inequality of instruction. How are we to establish a continual tendency in these three sources of inequality to diminish in activity and power? To lessen, though not to demolish, inequalities in wealth, it will be necessary for all artificial restrictions and exclusive advantages to be removed from fiscal or other legal arrangements, by which property is either acquired or accumulated: and among social changes tending in this direction will be the banishment by public opinion of an avaricious or mercenary spirit from marriage. Again, inequality between permanent and precarious incomes will be radically modified by the development of the application of the calculation of probabilities to life. The extension of annuities and insurance will not only benefit many individuals, but will benefit society at large by putting an end to that periodical ruin of a large number of families, which is such an ever-renewing source of misery and degradation. Another means to the same end will be found in discovering, by the same doctrine of probabilities, some other equally solid base for credit instead of a large capital, and for rendering the progress of industry and the activity of commerce more inde-



pendent of the existence of great capitalists. Something approaching to equality of instruction, even for those who can only spare a few of their early years for study, and in after times only a few hours of leisure, will become more attainable by improved selection of subjects, and improved methods of teaching them. The dwellers in one country will cease to be distinguished by the use of a rude or of a refined dialect; and this, it may be said in passing, has actually been the result of the school system in the United States. One portion of them will no longer be dependent upon any other for guidance in the smallest affairs. We cannot obliterate nor ignore natural differences of capacity, but after public instruction has been properly developed, 'the difference will be between men of superior enlightenment, and men of an upright character who feel the value of light without being dazzled by it; between talent or genius, and that good sense which knows how to appreciate and to enjoy both. Even if this difference were greater than has been said, if we compare the force and extent of faculty, it would become none the less insensible, if we compare their respective effects upon the relations of men among themselves, upon all that affects their independence and their happiness.'<sup>1</sup>

III. What are the changes that we may expect from the substantial perfecting of human nature and society? If, before making this forecast, we reflect with what feeble means the race has arrived at its

<sup>1</sup> *Rev.* pp. 244-251.

sent knowledge of useful and important truths, we shall not fear the reproach of temerity in our anticipations for a time when the force of all these means shall have been indefinitely increased. The progress of agricultural science will make the same land more productive, and the same labour more efficient. Nay, we shall predict what the art of converting elementary substances into food for our use may one day become. The constant tendency of population to advance to the limits of the means of subsistence thus amplified, shall be checked by a rising consciousness in men, that if they have obligations in respect of creatures unborn, these obligations consist in giving them, not existence but happiness, in adding to the well-being of the family, and not cumbering the earth with useless and unfortunate beings. This changed view upon population will partly follow from the substitution of rational ideas for those prejudices which have penetrated morals with an austerity that corrupting and degrading.<sup>1</sup> The movement will be further aided by one of the most important steps in human progress—the destruction, namely, of the prejudices that have established inequality of rights between the two sexes, and which are so mischievous even to the sex that seems to be most favoured.<sup>2</sup> We

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* pp. 257, 258.

<sup>2</sup> Condorcet had already assailed the prejudices that keep women in subjection in an excellent tract, published in 1790; *sur l'Admission des Femmes au Droit de Cité.* *Œuv.* x. 121-30.

seek in vain for any justification of such an inequality in difference of physical organisation, in force of intelligence, or in moral sensibility. It has no other origin than abuse of strength, and it is to no purpose that attempts are made to excuse it by sophisms. The destruction of the usages springing from this custom will render common those domestic virtues which are the foundation of all others, and will encourage education as well as make it more general, both because instruction would be imparted to both sexes with more equality, and because it cannot become general even for males without the aid of the mother of the family.<sup>1</sup>

Among other improvements under our third head will be the attainment of greater perfection in language.

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* p. 264. The rest of the passage is not perfectly intelligible to me, so I give it as it stands. '*Cet hommage trop tardif, rendu enfin à l'équité et au bon sens, ne tarirait-il pas une source trop féconde d'injustices, de cruautés et de crimes, en faisant disparaître une opposition si dangereuse entre le penchant naturel le plus vif, le plus difficile à réprimer, et les devoirs de l'homme ou les intérêts de la société? Ne produirait-il pas, au lieu des mœurs nationales douces et pures, formées non de privations orgueilleuses, d'apparences hypocrites, de réserves imposées par la crainte de la honte ou les terreurs religieuses, mais d'habitudes librement contractées, inspirées par la nature, avouées par la raison?*' Can these habits be the habits of Free Love, or what are they? Condorcet, we know, thought the indissolubility of marriage a monstrously bad thing, but the grounds which he gives for his thinking so would certainly lead to the infinite dissolubility of society. See a truly astounding passage in the *Fragment on the Tenth Epoch*, vii. 523-526. See also some curious words in a letter to Turgot, i. 221, 222.

leading at once to increased accuracy and increased concision. Laws and institutions, following the progress of knowledge, will be constantly undergoing modifications tending to identify individual with collective interests. Wars will grow less frequent with the extinction of those ideas of hereditary and dynastic rights, that have occasioned so many bloody contests. The art of learning will be facilitated by the institution of a Universal Language; and the art of teaching by resort to Technical Methods, or systems which unite in orderly arrangement a great number of different objects, so that their relations are perceived at a single glance.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, progress in medicine, the use of more wholesome food and healthy houses, the diminution of the two most active causes of deterioration, namely, misery and excessive wealth, must prolong the average duration of life, as well as raise the tone of health while it lasts. The force of transmissible diseases will be gradually weakened, until their quality of transmission vanishes. May we then not hope for the arrival of a time when death will cease to be anything but the effect either of extraordinary accidents, or of the destruction, ever slower and slower, of the vital forces? May we not believe that the duration of the middle interval between birth and this destruction has no assignable term? Man will never become immortal, but is it a mere chimera to hold that the term fixed to his years is slowly and perpetually

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* pp. 260-272.

receding further and further from the moment which his existence begins?<sup>1</sup>

The rapidity and the necessary incompleteness with which Condorcet threw out in isolated hints ideas of the future state of society, impart to his conception a certain mechanical aspect, which conveys an incorrect impression of his notion of the source whence social change must flow. His admirable and most careful remarks upon the moral training of children prove him to have been as far removed as possible from any of those theories of the formation of character which merely prescribe the imposition of moulds and casts from without, instead of cultivating the many spontaneous and sensitive processes of growth within.<sup>2</sup> Nobody has shown a deeper

<sup>1</sup> *Œuv.* pp. 272-275. Also p. 618.

<sup>2</sup> See *Fragment de l'Histoire de la X<sup>e</sup> Époque*. 'Il ne faut pas leur dire, mais les accoutumer à croire, à trouver au fond d'eux-mêmes, que la bonté et la justice sont nécessaires au bonheur, comme une respiration facile et libre l'est à la santé.' Of benefit for the young: 'Il faut qu'ils n'excedent jamais l'étendue de la délicatesse de la sensibilité.' 'Il faut renoncer à leur parler aux enfans de ce que ni leur esprit ni leur âme ne peuvent encore comprendre; ne pas leur faire admirer une constitution et rêver par cœur les droits politiques de l'homme quand ils n'ont à peine une idée nette de leurs relations avec leur famille et leurs camarades.'

Still more objectionable, we may be sure, would be to find the practice of drilling little children by the hearth or at the school-desk in creeds, catechisms, and the like repetition of mysteries baleful to the growing intelligence. 'Ainsi le développement des facultés humaines pendant la jeunesse est

ation of the delicacy of the material out of character is to be made, and of the susceptibility of its elementary structure; nor of the fact that on consists in such a discipline of the primitive as shall lead men to do right, not by the dint of mechanical external sanctions, but by instant, spontaneous, and almost inarticulate recourse to cowardice, cruelty, apathy, self-indulgence, and the other great roots and centres of wrong.

It was to a society composed of men and women whose characters had been shaped on this model, that Condorcet looked for the realisation of his altered hopes for humanity.<sup>1</sup>

With machinery and organisation, in truth, Condorcet did not greatly concern himself; probably too much rather than too much. The central idea of all

as,' he said admirably, '*mais n'abusons pas de cette faculté pour les mouler au gré de nos opinions de nos intérêts, ou de nos préjugés.*'—(Œuv. vi. 543-554.

also v. 303-305, where there are some deserved strictures on the malpractice of teaching children as truth what the parents themselves believe to be superstition or even falsehood.

Every reader may remember the speech of the Patriarch, in the Jew's play, against the Jew:

*Der mit Gewalt ein armes Christenkind  
Dem Junde seiner Tauf' entreißt! Denn ist  
Nicht alles, was man Kindern thut, Gewalt?  
Zu sagen: ausgenommen, was die Kirch',  
An Kindern thut.*

His *Mémoires sur l'Instruction Publique*, written in 1791, and printed in the seventh volume of the works, are still well worth turning to.

his aspirations was to procure the emancipation of reason, free and ample room for its exercise, and improved competence among men in the use of it. The subjugation of the modern intelligence beneath the disembodied fancies of the grotesque and sombre imagination of the Middle Ages, did not offend him more than the idea of any fixed organisation of the spiritual power, or any final and settled and universally accepted solution of belief and order would have done. With De Maistre and Comte the problem was the organised and systematic reconstruction of an anarchic society. With Condorcet it was how to persuade men to exert the individual reason methodically and independently, not without co-operation, but without anything like official or other subordination.

His cardinal belief and precept was, as with Socrates, that the *βίος ἀνεξέταστος* is not to be lived by man. As we have seen, the freedom of the reason was so dear to him, that he counted it an abuse for a parent to instil his own convictions into the defenceless minds of his young children. This was the natural outcome of Condorcet's mode of viewing history as the record of intellectual emancipation, while to Comte its deepest interest was as a record of moral and emotional cultivation. If we value in one type of thinker the intellectual conscientiousness, which refrains from perplexing men by propounding problems unless the solution can be set forth also, perhaps we owe no less honour in the

thinker of another type to that intellectual self-denial which makes him very careful lest the too rigid projection of his own specific conclusions should by any means obstruct the access of a single ray of fertilising light. This religious scrupulosity, which made him abhor all interference with the freedom and openness of the understanding as the worst kind of sacrilege, was Condorcet's eminent distinction. If, as some think, the world will gradually transform its fear or love of unknowable gods into a devout reverence for those who have stirred in men a sense of the dignity of their own nature and of its large and multitudinous possibilities, then will his name not fail of deep and perpetual recollection.





## JOSEPH DE MAISTRE.

OWING to causes which lie tolerably near the surface, the remarkable Catholic reaction which took place in France at the beginning of the present century, has never received in England the attention that it deserves; not only for its striking interest as an episode in the history of European thought, but also for its peculiarly forcible and complete presentation of those ideas with which what is called the modern spirit is supposed to be engaged in deadly war. For one thing, the Protestantism of England strips a genuinely Catholic movement of speculation of that pressing and practical importance which belongs to it in countries where nearly all spiritual sentiment, that has received any impression of religion at all, unavoidably runs in Catholic forms. With us the theological reaction against the ideas of the eighteenth was not and could not be other than Protestant. The defence and reinstatement of Christianity in each case was conducted, as might have been expected, with reference to the dominant creed and system of the country. If Coleridge had been a Catholic, his works thus newly coloured by an alien creed would have been

read by a small sect only, instead of exercising as they did a wide influence over the whole nation, reaching people through those usual conduits of press and pulpit, by which the products of philosophic thought are conveyed to unphilosophic minds. As naturally in France, hostility to all those influences which were believed to have brought about the Revolution, to sensationalism in metaphysics, to atheism in what should have been theology, to the notion of sovereignty of peoples in politics, inevitably sought a rallying-point in a renewed allegiance to that prodigious spiritual system which had fostered the germs of order and social feeling in Europe, and whose name remains even now in the days of its ruin, as the most permanent symbol and exemplar of stable organisation. Another reason for English indifference to this movement is the rapidity with which here, as elsewhere, dust gathers thickly round the memory of the champions of lost causes. Some of the most excellent of human characteristics—intensity of belief, for example, and a fervid anxiety to realise aspirations—unite with some of the least excellent of them, to make us too habitually forget that, as Mill has said, the best adherents of a fallen standard in philosophy, in religion, in politics, are usually next in all good qualities of understanding and sentiment to the best of those who lead the van of the force that triumphs. Men are not so anxious as they should be, considering the infinite diversity of effort that goes to the advancement of mankind, to pick up

the fragments of truth and positive contribution, that so nothing be lost, and as a consequence the writings of antagonists with whom we are believed to have nothing in common, lie unexamined and disregarded.

In the case of the group of writers who, after a century of criticism, ventured once more with an intrepid confidence—differing fundamentally from the tone of preceding apologists in the Protestant camp, who were nearly as critical as the men they refuted—to vindicate not the bare outlines of Christian faith, but the entire scheme, in its extreme manifestation, of the most ancient and severely maligned of all Christian organisations, this apathy is very much to be regretted on several grounds. In the first place, it is impossible to see intelligently to the bottom of the momentous spirit of ultramontaniam, which is so deep a difficulty of continental Europe, and which, touching us in Ireland, is perhaps already one of our own deepest difficulties, without comprehending in its best shape the theory on which ultramontaniam rests. And this theory it is impossible to seize thoroughly, without some knowledge of the ideas of its most efficient defenders in its earlier years. Secondly, it is among these ideas that we have to look for the representation in their most direct, logical, uncompromising, and unmistakable form of those theological ways of regarding life and prescribing right conduct, whose more or less rapidly accelerated destruction is the first condition of the further elevation of humanity, as

well in power of understanding as in morals and spirituality. In all contests of this kind there is the greatest and most obvious advantage in being able to see your enemy full against the light. Thirdly, in one or two respects, the Catholic reactionaries at the beginning of the century insisted very strongly on principles of society which the general thought of the century before had almost entirely dropped out of sight, and which we who, in spite of many differences, still sail down the same great current, and are propelled by the same great tide, are accustomed almost equally either to leave in the background of speculation, or else deliberately to deny and suppress. Such we may account the importance which they attach to organisation, and the value they set upon a common spiritual faith and doctrine as a social basis. That the form which the recognition of these principles is destined to assume will at all correspond to their hopes and anticipations, is one of the most unlikely things possible. This, however, need not detract from the worth for our purpose of their exposition of the principles themselves. Again, the visible traces of the impression made by the writings of this school on the influential founder of the earliest Positivist system, are sufficiently deep and important to make some knowledge of them of the highest historical interest, both to those who accept and those who detest that system.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were three chief schools of thought, the Sensational, the Catholic, and the Eclectic; or as it may be put

in other terms, the Materialist, the Theological, and the Spiritualist. The first looked for the sources of knowledge, the sanction of morals, the inspiring fountain and standard of aesthetics, to the outside of man, to matter, and the impressions made by matter on the corporeal senses. The second looked to divine revelation, authority and the traditions of the Church. The third, steering a middle course, looked partly within and partly without, relied partly on the senses, partly on revelation and history, but still more on a certain internal consciousness of a direct and immediate kind, which is the supreme and reconciling judge of the reports alike of the senses, of history, of divine revelation.<sup>1</sup> Each of these schools had many exponents. The three most conspicuous champions of revived Catholicism were De Maistre, De Bonald, and Chateaubriand. The last of them, the author of the *Génie du Christianisme*, was effective in France because he is so deeply sentimental, but he was too little trained in speculation, and too little equipped with knowledge, to be fairly taken as the best intellectual representative of their way of thinking. De Bonald was of much heavier calibre. He really thought, while Chateaubriand only felt, and the *Législation Primitive* and the *Pensées sur Divers Sujets* contain much that an enemy of the school will find it worth while to read, in spite of an artificial, and, if a foreigner may judge, a detestable style.

<sup>1</sup> See Damiron's *La Philosophie en France au XIX<sup>ème</sup> Siècle*. Introduction to Vol. I. (Fifth edition.)

De Maistro was the greatest of the three, and deserves better than either of the others to stand as the type of the school for many reasons. His style is so marvellously lucid, that, notwithstanding the mystical, or, as he said, the illuminist side of his mind, we can never be in much doubt about his meaning, which is not by any means the case with Ronald. To say nothing of his immensely superior natural capacity, De Maistro's extensive reading in the literature of his foes was a source of strength, which might indeed have been thought indispensable, if only other persons had not attacked the same people as he did, without knowing much or anything at all at first-hand about them. Then he goes over the whole field of allied subjects, which we have a right to expect to have handled by anybody with a systematic view of the origin of knowledge, the meaning of ethics, the elements of social order and progressiveness, the government and scheme of the universe. And above all, his writings are penetrated with the air of reality and life, which comes of actual participation in the affairs of that world with which social philosophers have to deal. Lamennais had in many respects a finer mind than De Maistro, but the conclusions in which he was finally landed, no less than his liberal aims, prevent him from being an example of the truly Catholic reaction. He obviously represented the Revolution, or the critical spirit, within the Catholic limits, while De Maistro's ruling idea was, in his own trenchant phrase, '*absolument hier*

*l'esprit du dix-huitième siècle.* On all these accounts he appears to be the fittest expositor of those conceptions which the anarchy that closed the eighteenth century provoked into systematic existence.

## I.

Joseph de Maistre was born at Chambéry in the year 1754.<sup>1</sup> His family was the younger branch of a stock in Languedoc, which about the beginning of the seventeenth century divided itself into two, one remaining in France, the other establishing itself in Piedmont. It is not wonderful that the descendants of the latter, settled in a country of small extent and little political importance, placed a high value on their kinship with an ancient line in the powerful kingdom of France. Joseph de Maistre himself was always particularly anxious to cultivate close relations with his French kinsfolk, partly from the old aristocratic feeling of blood, and partly from his intellectual appreciation of the gifts of the French mind, and its vast influence as an universal propagating power. His father held a high office in the government of Savoy, and enjoyed so eminent a reputation that on his death both the Senate and the King of Sardinia deliberately recorded their appreciation of his loss.

<sup>1</sup> The facts of De Maistre's life I have drawn from a very meagre biography by his son, Count Rodolphe de Maistre, supplemented by two volumes of *Lettres et Opuscules* (Fourth edition, Paris: Vaton, 1865), and a volume of his *Diplomatic Correspondence*, edited by M. Albert Blanc.



as a public calamity. His mother is said to have been a woman of lofty and devout character, and her influence over her oldest son was exceptionally strong and tender. He used to declare in after life that he was as docile in her hands as the youngest of his sisters. Among other marks of his affectionate submission to parental authority, we are told that during the whole time of his residence at Turin, where he followed a course of law, he never read a single book without previously writing to Chambéry to one or other of his parents for their sanction. Such traditions linger in families, and when he came to have children of his own, they too read nothing of which their father had not been asked to express his approbation. De Maistre's early education was directed by the Jesuits; and as might have been expected from the generous susceptibility of his temper, he never ceased to think of them with warm esteem. To the end of his life he remembered the gloom which fell upon the household, though he was not nine years old at the time, when the news arrived of the edict of 1764, abolishing the Society in the kingdom of France. One element of his education he commemorates in a letter to his favourite daughter. 'Let your brother,' he says, 'work hard at the French poets. Let him learn them by heart, especially the incomparable Racine; never mind whether he understands him yet or not. I didn't understand him when my mother used to come repeating his verses by my bedside, and lulled me to sleep with her fine

voice to the sound of that inimitable music. I knew hundreds of lines long before I knew how to read; and it is thus that my ears, accustomed betimes to this ambrosia, have never since been able to endure any sorer draught.'

After his law studies at the University of Turin, then highly renowned for its jurisconsults, the young De Maistre went through the successive stages of an official career, performing various duties in the public administration, and possessing among other honours a seat in the Senate, over which his father presided. He led a tranquil life at Chambéry, then as at all other times an ardent reader and student. Unaided he taught himself five languages. English he mastered so perfectly, that though he could not follow it when spoken, he could read a book in that tongue with as much ease as if it had been in his own. To Greek and German he did not apply himself until afterwards, and he never acquired the same proficiency in them as in English, French, Italian, Latin, and Spanish. To be ignorant of German then, it will be remembered, was not what it would be now, to be without one of the literary senses.

Like nearly every other great soldier of reaction, he showed in his early life a decided inclination for new ideas. The truth that the wildest extravagances of youthful aspiration are a better omen of a vigorous and enlightened manhood than the decorous and ignoble faith in the perfection of existing arrangements, was not belied in the case of De Maistre.

His intelligence was of too hard and exact a kind to inspire him with the exalted schemes that present themselves to those more nobly imaginative minds who dream dreams and see visions. He projected no Savoyard emigration to the banks of the Susquehanna or Delaware, to found millennial societies and pantisocratic unions. These generous madnesses belong to men of more poetic temper. But still, in spite of the deadening influences of officialism and relations with a court, De Maistre had far too vigorous and active a character to subside without resistance into the unfruitful ways of obstruction and social complacency. It is one of the most certain marks, we may be sure, of a superior spirit, that the impulses earliest awakened by its first fresh contact with the facts of the outer world are those which quicken a desire for the improvement of the condition of society, the increase of the happiness of men, the amelioration of human destiny. With this unwritten condition of human nature De Maistre, like other men of his mental calibre, is found to have complied. He incurred the suspicion and ill-will of most of those by whom he was immediately surrounded, by belonging to a Reform Lodge at Chambéry. . The association was one of a perfectly harmless character, but being an association, it diffused a tarnishing vapour of social disaffection and insurgency over the names of all who ventured to belong to it, and De Maistre was pointed out to the Sardinian court as a man with leanings towards new things, and therefore one of whom it were

well to beware. There was little ground for apprehension. In very small countries there is seldom room enough for the growth of a spirit of social revolution; not at least until some great and dominant country has released the forces of destruction. So, when the menacing sounds of the approaching hurricane in France grew heavy in the air, the little lodge at Chambéry voluntarily dissolved itself, and De Maistro was deputed to convey to the king, Victor Amadeo III., the honourable assurance of its members that they had assembled for the last time.

In 1780, at the age of thirty-two, De Maistro had married, and when the storm burst which destroyed all the hopes of his life, he was the father of two children. In one of his gay letters to a venerable lady who was on intimate terms with them both, he has left a picture of his wife, which is not any less interesting for what it reveals of his own character. "The contrast between us two is the very strangest in the world. For me, as you may have found out, I am the *poco curante* senator, and above all things very free in saying what I think. She, on the contrary, will take care that it is noon before allowing that the sun has risen, for fear of committing herself. She knows what must be done or what must not be done on the tenth of October 1808, at ten o'clock in the morning, to avoid some inconvenience which otherwise would come to pass at midnight between the fifteenth and sixteenth of March 1810. "But, my dear husband, you pay attention to nothing; you believe that nobody

is thinking of any harm. Now I know, I have been told, I have guessed, I foresee, I warn you," etc. "Come now, my dear, leave me alone. You are only wasting your time: I foresee that I shall never foresee things: that's your business." She is the supplement to me, and hence when I am separated from her, as I am now, I suffer absurdly from being obliged to think about my own affairs; I would rather have to chop wood all day. . . . My children ought to kiss her very steps; for my part, I have no gift for education. She has such a gift, that I look upon it as nothing less than the eighth endowment of the Holy Ghost; I mean a certain fond persecution by which it is given her to torment her children from morning to night to do something, not to do something, to learn—and yet without for a moment losing their tender affection for her. How can she manage it? I cannot make it out.' She was laughingly called by himself and her friends, Madame Prudence. It is certain that few women have found more necessity for the qualities implied in this creditable nickname.

They had not been married many years before they were overtaken by irreparable disaster. The French Revolution broke out, and Savoy was invaded by the troops of the new Republic. Count De Maistre, with his wife and children, fled from Chambéry across the Alps to Aosta. '*Ma chère amie,*' he said to his wife, by the side of a great rock which he never afterwards forgot, 'the step that we are taking to-day is irrevocable; it decides our lot for life;' and

the presentiment was true. Soon the *Loi des Allobroges* was promulgated, which enjoined upon all who had left their homes in Savoy to return instantly, under pain of confiscation of all their property. It was the very depth of winter. Madame de Maistro was in the ninth month of her pregnancy. She knew that her husband would endure anything rather than expose her to the risks of a journey in such a season. So, urged by a desire to save something from the wreck of their fortune by compliance with the French decree, she seized the opportunity of her husband's absence at Turin, and started for Savoy without acquainting him with her design. She crossed the Great St. Bernard in the beginning of January on the back of a mule, accompanied by her two little children wrapped in blankets. The Count, on his return to Aosta two or three days afterwards, forthwith set off in her steps, in the trembling expectation of finding her dead or dying in some Alpine hovel. But the favour of fate and a stout heart brought her safe to Chambéry, where shortly afterwards she was joined by her husband. The authorities vainly tendered him the oath, vainly bade him inscribe his name on the register of citizens; and when they asked him for a contribution to support the war, he replied curtly that he did not give money to kill his brothers in the service of the King of Sardinia. As soon as his wife was delivered of their third child, whom he was destined not to see again for nearly twenty years, he quitted her side, abandoned his property and his

country, and took refuge at Lausanne, where in time his wife and his two eldest children once more came to him.

Gibbon tells us how a swarm of emigrants, escaping from the public ruin, was attracted by the vicinity, the manners, and the language of Lausanne. 'They are entitled to our pity,' he reflected, 'and they may claim our esteem, but they cannot in their present state of mind and fortune contribute much to our amusement. Instead of looking down as calm and idle spectators on the theatre of Europe, our domestic harmony is somewhat embittered by the infusion of party spirit.' Gibbon died in London almost at the very moment that De Maistre arrived at Lausanne, but his account of things remained true, and political feuds continued to run as high as ever. Among the people with whom De Maistre was thrown was Madame de Staël. 'As we had not been to the same school,' he says, 'either in theology or in politics, we had some scenes enough to make one die of laughter; still without quarrelling. Her father, who was then alive, was the friend and relative of people that I love with all my heart, and that I would not vex for all the world. So I allowed the *émigrés* who surrounded us to cry out as they would, without ever drawing the sword.' De Maistre thought he never came across a head so completely turned wrong as Madame de Staël's, the infallible consequence, as he took it to be, of modern philosophy operating upon a woman's nature. He once said of her: 'Ah! if Madame de Staël had been

Catholic, she would have been adorable, instead of famous.' We can believe that his position among the French *émigrés* was not particularly congenial. For though they hated the Revolution, they had all drunk of the waters of the eighteenth century philosophy, and De Maistre hated this philosophy worse than he hated the Revolution itself. Then again, they would naturally vapour about the necessities of strong government. 'Yes,' said the Savoyard exile, 'but be quite sure that, to make the monarchy strong, you must rest it on the laws, avoiding everything arbitrary, too frequent commissions, and all ministerial jobberies.' We may well believe how unsavoury this rational and just talk was to people who meant by strong government a system that should restore to them their old prerogatives of anti-social oppression and selfish corruption. The order that De Maistre vindicated was a very different thing from the deadly and poisonous order which was the object of the prayers of the incorrigible royalists around him.

After staying three years at Lausanne, De Maistre went to Turin, but shortly afterwards the Sardinian king, at the end of a long struggle, was forced to succumb to the power of the French, then in the full tide of success. Bonaparte's brilliant Italian campaign needs no words here. The French entered Turin, and De Maistre, being an *émigré*, had to leave it. Furnished with a false passport, and undergoing a thousand hardships and dangers, he made his way, once more in the depth of a severe winter (1797),



to Venice. He went part of the way down the Po in a small trading ship, crowded with ladies, priests, monks, soldiers, and a bishop. There was only one small fire on board, at which all the cooking had to be done, and where the unhappy passengers had to keep themselves warm as they could. At night they were confined each to a space about three planks broad, separated from neighbours by pieces of canvas hanging from a rope above. Each bank of the river was lined by military posts—the left by the Austrians, and the right by the French; and the danger of being fired into was constantly present to aggravate the misery of overcrowding, scanty food, and bitter cold. Even this wretchedness was surpassed by the hardships which confronted the exiles at Venice. The physical distress endured here by De Maistre and his unfortunate family exceeded that of any other period of their wanderings. He was cut off from the court, and from all his relations and friends, and reduced for the means of existence to a few fragments of silver plate, which had somehow been saved from the universal wreck. This slender resource grew less day by day, and when that was exhausted the prospect was a blank. The student of De Maistre's philosophy may see in what crushing personal anguish some of its most sinister growths had their roots. When the cares of beggary come suddenly upon a man in middle life, they burn very deep. Alone, and starving for a cause that is dear to him, he might encounter the grimness of fate with a fortitude in which there should

be many elevating and consoling elements. But the destiny is intolerably hard which condemns a man of humane mould, as De Maistre certainly was, to look helplessly on the physical pains of a tender woman and famishing little ones. The anxieties that press upon his heart in such calamity as this are too sharp, too tightened, and too sordid for him to draw a single free breath, or to raise his eyes for a single moment of relief from the monstrous perplexity that chokes him. The hour of bereavement has its bitterness, but the bitterness is gradually suffused with soft reminiscence. The grip of beggary leaves a mark on such a character as De Maistre's which no prosperity of after days effaces. The seeming inhumanity of his theory of life, which is so revolting to comfortable people like M. Villemain, was in truth the only explanation of his own cruel sufferings in which he could find any solace. It was not that he hated mankind, but that his destiny looked as if God hated him, and this was a horrible moral complexity out of which he could only extricate himself by a theory in which pain and torment seem to stand out as the main facts in human existence.

To him, indeed, prosperity never came. Hope smiled on him momentarily, but, in his own words: 'It was only a flash in the night.' While he was in Venice, the armies of Austria and Russia reconquered the north of Italy, and Charles Emmanuel IV., in the natural anticipation that the allies would at once restore his dominions, hastened forward. Austria, how

ever, as De Maistre had seen long before, was indifferent or even absolutely hostile to Sardinian interests, and she successfully opposed Charles Emanuel's restoration. The king received the news of the perfidy of his nominal ally at Florence, but not until after he had made arrangements for rewarding the fidelity of some of his most loyal adherents.

It was from Florence that De Maistre received the king's nomination to the chief place in the government of the island of Sardinia. Through the short time of his administration here, he was overwhelmed with vexations only a little more endurable than the physical distresses which had weighed him down at Venice. During the war, justice had been administered in a grossly irregular manner. Hence, people had taken the law into their own hands, and retaliation had completed the round of wrong-doing. The taxes were collected with great difficulty. The higher class exhibited an invincible repugnance to paying their debts. Some of these difficulties in the way of a firm and orderly government were insuperable, and De Maistre vexed his soul in an unequal and only partially successful contest. In after years, amid the miseries of his life in Russia, he wrote to his brother thus: 'Sometimes in moments of solitude that multiply as much as I possibly can, I throw my head back on the cushion of my sofa, and there with no four walls around me, far from all that is dear to me, confronted by a sombre and impenetrable future, recall the days when in a little town that you knew

well'—he meant Cagliari—'with my head resting on another sofa, and only seeing around our own exclusive circle (good heavens, what an impertinence!) little men and little things, I used to ask myself: "Am I then condemned to live and die in this place, like a limpet on a rock?" I suffered bitterly; my head was overloaded, wearied, flattened, by the enormous weight of Nothing.'

But presently a worse thing befell him. In 1802 he received an order from the king to proceed to St. Petersburg as envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary at the court of Russia. Even from this bitter proof of devotion to his sovereign he did not shrink. He had to tear himself from his wife and children, without any certainty when so cruel a separation would be likely to end; to take up new functions which the circumstances of the time rendered excessively difficult; while the petty importance of the power he represented, and its mendicant attitude in Europe, robbed his position of that public distinction and dignity which may richly console a man for the severest private sacrifice. It is a kind destiny which veils their future from mortal men. Fifteen years passed before De Maistre's exile came to a close. From 1802 to 1817 he did not quit the inhospitable latitudes of northern Russia.

De Maistre's letters during this desolate period furnish a striking picture of his manner of life and his mental state. We see in them his most prominent characteristics strongly marked. Not even the pain-

fulness of the writer's situation ever clouds his intrepid and vigorous spirit. Lively and gallant sallies of humour to his female friends, sagacious judgments on the position of Europe to political people, bits of learned criticism for erudite people, tender and playful chat with his two daughters, all these alternate with one another with the most delightful effect. Whether he is writing to his little girl whom he has never known, or to the king of Sardinia, or to some author who sends him a book, or to a minister who has found fault with his diplomacy, there is in all alike the same constant and remarkable play of a bright and penetrating intellectual light, coloured by a humour that is now and then a little sardonic, but more often is genial and lambent. There is a certain semi-latent quality of hardness lying at the bottom of De Maistre's style, both in his letters and in his more elaborate compositions. His writings seem to recall the flavour and bouquet of some of the fortifying and stimulating wines of Burgundy, from which time and warmth have not yet drawn out a certain native roughness that lingers on the palate. This hardness, if one must give the quality a name that only imperfectly describes it, sprang not from any original want of impressionableness or sensibility of nature, but partly from the relentless buffetings which he had to endure at the hands of fortune, and partly from the preponderance which had been given to the rational side of his mind by long habits of sedulous and accurate study. Few men knew so perfectly as he knew

how to be touching without ceasing to be masculine, nor how to go down into the dark pits of human life without forgetting the broad sunlight, nor how to keep habitually close to visible and palpable fact while eagerly addicted to speculation. His contemplations were perhaps somewhat too near the ground; they led him into none of those sublimer regions of subtle feeling where the rarest human spirits have loved to travel; we do not think of his mind among those who have gone

Voyaging through strange seas of thought alone.

If this kind of temper, strong, keen, frank, and a little hard and mordant, brought him too near a mischievous disbelief in the dignity of men and their lives, at least it kept him well away from morbid weakness in ethics, and from beating the winds in metaphysics. But of this we shall see more in considering his public pieces than can be gathered from his letters.

The discomforts of De Maistre's life at St. Petersburg were extreme. The dignity of his official style and title was an aggravation of the exceeding straitness of his means. The ruined master could do little to mitigate the ruin of his servant. He had to keep up the appearance of an ambassador on the salary of a clerk. 'This is the second winter,' he writes to his brother in 1810, 'that I have gone through without a pelisse, which is exactly like going without a shirt at Cagliari. When I come from court a very sorry lackey throws a common cloak over my

shoulders.' The climate suited him better than he had expected; and in one letter he vows that he was the only living being in Russia who had passed two winters without fur boots and a fur hat. It was considered indispensable that he should keep a couple of servants; so, for his second, De Maistre was obliged to put up with a thief, whom he rescued under the shelter of ambassadorial privilege from the hands of justice, on condition that he would turn honest. The Austrian ambassador, with whom he was on good terms, would often call to take him out to some entertainment. 'His fine servants mount my staircase groping their way in the dark, and we descend preceded by a servant carrying *luminare minus quam ut præesset nocti*.' 'I am certain,' he adds pleasantly, 'that they make songs about me in their Austrian patois. Poor souls! it is well they can amuse themselves.'

Sometimes he was reduced so far as to share the soup of his valet, for lack of richer and more independent fare. Then he was constantly fretted by enemies at home, who disliked his trenchant diplomacy, and distrusted the strength and independence of a mind which was too vigorous to please the old-fashioned ministers of the Sardinian court. These chagrins he took as a wise man should. They disturbed him less than his separation from his family. 'Six hundred leagues away from you all,' he writes to his brother, 'the thoughts of my family, the reminiscences of childhood, transport me with sad-

ness.' Visions of his mother's saintly face haunted his chamber; almost gloomier still was the recollection of old intimates with whom he had played, lived, argued, and worked for years, and yet who now no longer bore him in mind. There are not many glimpses of this melancholy in the letters meant for the eye of his beloved *trinité féminine*, as he playfully called his wife and two daughters. '*A quoi bon vous attrister,*' he asked bravely, '*sans raison et sans profit?*' Occasionally he cannot help letting out to them how far his mind is removed from composure. 'Every day as I return home I found my house as desolate as if it was yesterday you left me. In society the same fancy pursues me, and scarcely ever quits me.' Music, as might be surmised in so sensitive a nature, drove him almost beside himself with its mysterious power of intensifying the dominant emotion. 'Whenever by any chance I hear the harpsichord,' he says, 'melancholy seizes me. The sound of the violin gives me such a heavy heart, that I am fain to leave the company and hasten home.' He tossed in his bed at night, thinking he heard the sound of weeping at Turin, making a thousand efforts to picture to himself the looks of that 'orphan child of a living father' whom he had never known, wondering if ever he should know her, and battling with a myriad of black phantoms that seemed to rustle in his curtains. 'But you, M. de Chevalier,' he said apologetically to the correspondent to whom he told these dismal things, 'you are a father, you know the cruel dreams



of a waking man ; if you were not of the profession I would not allow my pen to write you this jeremiad.' As De Maistre was accustomed to think himself happy if he got three hours' sound sleep in the night, these sombre and terrible vigils were ample enough to excuse him if he had allowed them to overshadow all other things. But the vigour of his intellect was too strenuous, and his curiosity and interest in every object of knowledge too inextinguishable. 'After all,' he said, 'the only thing to do is to put on a good face, and to march to the place of torture with a few friends to console you on the way. This is the charming image under which I picture my present situation. Mark you,' he added, 'I always count books among one's consoling friends.'

In one of the most gay and charming of his letters, apologising to a lady for the remissness of his correspondence, he explains that diplomacy and books occupy every moment. 'You will admit, madam, there is no possibility of one's shutting up books entirely. Nay, more than ever, I feel myself burning with the feverish thirst for knowledge. I have had an access of it which I cannot describe to you. The most curious books literally run after me, and hurry voluntarily to place themselves in my hands. As soon as diplomacy gives me a moment of breathing-time I rush headlong to that favourite pasture, to that ambrosia of which the mind can never have enough—

*Et voilà ce qui fait que votre ami est muet.*

He thinks himself happy if, by refusing invitations to dinner, he can pass a whole day without stirring from his house. 'I read, I write, I study; for after all one must know something.' In his hours of depression he fancied that he only read and worked, not for the sake of the knowledge, but to stupify and tire himself out, if that were possible.

As a student De Maistre was indefatigable. He never belonged to that languid band who hoped to learn difficult things by easy methods. The only way, he warned his son, is to shut your door, to say that you are not within, and to work. 'Since they have set themselves to teach us how we ought to learn the dead languages, you can find nobody who knows them; and it is amusing enough that people who don't know them, should be so obstinately bent on demonstrating the vices of the methods employed by us who do know them.' He was one of those wise and laborious students who do not read without a pen in their hands. He never shrank from the useful toil of transcribing abundantly from all the books he read everything that could by any possibility eventually be of service to him in his inquiries. His notebooks were enormous. As soon as one of them was filled, he carefully made up an index of its contents, numbered it, and placed it on a shelf with its forgotten predecessors. In one place he accidentally mentions that he had some thirty of these folios over the head of his writing-table.

'If I am a pedant at home,' he said, 'at least I am

as little as possible a pedant out of doors.' In the evening he would occasionally seek the society of ladies, by way of recovering some of that native gaiety of heart which had hitherto kept him alive. 'I blow on this spark,' to use his own words, 'just as an old woman blows among the ashes to get a light for her lamp.' A student and a thinker, De Maistre was also a man of the world, and he may be added to the long list of writers who have shown that to take an active part in public affairs and mix in society give a peculiar life, reality, and force to both scholarship and speculation. It was computed at that time that the author of a philosophic piece could not safely count upon more than a hundred and fifty readers in Russia; and hence, we might be sure, even if we had not De Maistre's word for it, that away from his own house he left his philosophy behind. The vehemence of his own convictions did not prevent him from being socially tolerant to others who hated them. 'If I had the good fortune to be among his acquaintances,' he wrote of a heretical assailant, 'he would see that among the people with convictions it would be hard to find one so free from prejudice as I am. I have many friends among the Protestants, and now that their system is tottering, they are all the dearer to me.' In spite of his scanty means, his shabby valet, his threadbare cloak, and the humbleness of his diplomatic position, the fire and honesty of his character combined with his known ability to place him high in the esteem of the society of St

Petersburg. His fidelity, devotion, and fortitude, mellowed by many years and by meditative habits, and tinged perhaps by the patrician consciousness of birth, formed in him a modest dignity of manner which men respected. They perceived it to be no artificial assumption, but the outward image of a lofty and self-respecting spirit. His brother diplomatists, even the representatives of France, appear to have treated him with marked consideration. His letters prove him to have been a favourite among ladies. The Emperor Alexander showed him considerable kindness of the cheap royal sort. He conferred on his brother, Xavier de Maistre, a post in one of the public museums, while to the Sardinian envoy's son he gave a commission in the Russian service.

The first departure of this son for the campaign of 1807 occasioned some of the most charming passages in De Maistre's letters, both to the young soldier himself and to others. For though without a touch of morbid expansiveness, he never denied himself the solace of opening his heart to a trusted friend, and a just reserve with strangers did not hinder a humane and manly confidence with intimates. 'This morning,' he wrote to his stripling, soon after he had joined the army, 'I felt a tightening at my heart when a pet dog came running in and jumped upon your bed, where he finds you no more. He soon perceived his mistake; and snid clearly enough, after his own fashion: *I am mistaken; where can he be then?* As for me I have felt all that you will feel, if ever you pursue this

mighty trade of being a father.' And then he thought of his son if he should find himself with a tape-line in his hand, that he will take his exact measure and forward it. Soon came the news of the battle of Friedland, and the unhappy father thought he read the fate of his son in the face of every acquaintance he met. And so it was in later campaigns, as De Maistre records in correspondence that glows with tender and healthy solicitude. All this is worth dwelling upon, for two reasons. First, because De Maistre has been too much regarded and spoken of as a man of cold sensibility, and little moved by the hardships which fill the destiny of our unfortunate race. And, secondly, because his own keen acquaintance with mental anguish helps us to understand the zeal with which he attempts to reconcile the blind cruelty and pain and torture endured by mortals with the benignity and wisdom of the immortal. 'After all,' he used to say, 'there are only two real evils—remorse and disease.' This is true enough for an apophthegm, but as a matter of fact it never for an instant dulled his sensibility to far less supreme forms of agony than the recollection of irreparable pain struck into the lives of others. It is interesting and suggestive to recall how a later publicist viewed the ills that dwarf our little lives. 'If I were asked to class human miseries,' said Tocqueville, 'I would do so in this order: first, Disease; second, Death; third, Doubt.' At a later date, he altered the order, and deliberately declared doubt to be the most

insupportable of all evils, worse than death itself. But Tocqueville was an aristocrat, as Guizot once told him, who accepted his defeat. He stood on the brink of the great torrent of democracy, and shivered. De Maistre was an aristocrat too, but he was incapable of knowing what doubt or hesitation meant. He never dreamt that his cause was lost, and he mocked and defied the Revolution to the end. We easily see how natures of this sort, ardent, impetuous, unflinching, find themselves in the triumphant paths that lead to remorse at their close, and how they thus come to feel remorse rather than doubt as the consummate agony of the human mind.

Having had this glimpse of De Maistre's character away from his books, we need not linger long over the remaining events of his life. In 1814 his wife and two daughters joined him in the Russian capital. Two years later an outburst of religious fanaticism caused the sudden expulsion of the Jesuits from Russia, to De Maistre's deep mortification. Several conversions had taken place from the Orthodox to the Western faith, and these inflamed the Orthodox party, headed by the Prince de Galitzin, the minister of public worship, with violent theological fury. De Maistre, whose intense attachment to his own creed was well known, fell under suspicion of having connived at these conversions, and the Emperor himself went so far as to question him. 'I told him,' De Maistre says, 'that I had never changed the faith of any of his subjects, but that if any of them had by

chance made me a sharer of their confidence, neither honour nor conscience would have allowed me to tell them that they were wrong.' This kind of dialogue between a sovereign and an ambassador implied a situation plainly unfavourable to effective diplomacy. The envoy obtained his recall, and after twenty-five years' absence returned to his native country (1817). On his way home, it may be noticed, De Maistre passed a few days in Paris, and thus, for the first and last time, one of the most eminent of modern French writers found himself on French soil.

The king accorded De Maistre an honourable reception, conferred upon him a high office and a small sum of money, and lent his ear to other counsellors. The philosopher, though insisting on declaring his political opinions, then, as ever, unwaveringly anti-revolutionary, threw himself mainly upon that literary composition which had been his solace in yet more evil days than these. It was at this time that he gave to the world the supreme fruit of nearly half a century of study, meditation, and contact with the world, in *Du Pape*, *Les Soirées de Saint Pétersbourg*, and *L'Eglise Gallicane*. Their author did not live long to enjoy the vast discussion which they occasioned, nor the reputation that they have since conferred upon his name. He died in February 1821 after such a life as we have seen.

## II.

It is not at all surprising that they upon whom the revolutionary deluge came should have looked with indiscriminating horror and affright on all the influences which in their view had united first to gather up, and then to release the destructive flood. The eighteenth century to men like De Maistre seemed an infamous parenthesis, mysteriously interposed between the glorious age of Bossuet and Fénelon, and that yet brighter era for faith and the Church which was still to come in the good time of Divine Providence. The philosophy of the last century, he says on more than one occasion, will form one of the most shameful epochs of the human mind : it never praised even good men except for what was bad in them. He looked upon the gods whom that century had worshipped as the direct authors of the bloodshed and ruin in which their epoch had closed. The memory of mild and humane philosophers was covered with the kind of black execration that prophets of old had hurled at Baal or Moloch ; Locke and Hume, Voltaire and Rousseau, were habitually spoken of as very scourges of God. From this temper two consequences naturally flowed. In the first place, while it lasted there was no hope of an honest philosophic discussion of the great questions which divide speculative minds. Moderation and impartiality were virtues of almost superhuman difficulty for controversialists who had made up their minds that it was



their opponents who had erected the guillotine, confiscated the sacred property of the church, slaughtered and banished her children, and filled the land with terror and confusion. It is hard amid the smoking ruins of the homestead to do full justice to the theoretical arguments of the supposed authors of the conflagration. Hence De Maistre, though, as has been already said, intimately acquainted with the works of his foes in the letter, was prevented by the vehemence of his antipathy to the effects which he attributed to them, from having any just critical estimate of their value and true spirit. 'I do not know one of these men,' he says of the philosophers of the eighteenth century, 'to whom the sacred title of honest man is quite suitable.' They are all wanting in probity. Their very names '*me déchirent la bouche.*' To admire Voltaire is the sign of a corrupt soul; and if anybody is drawn to the works of Voltaire, then be sure that God does not love such an one. The divine anathema is written on the very face of this arch-blasphemer; on his shameless brow, in the two extinct craters still sparkling with sensuality and hate, in that frightful *ricтус* running from ear to ear, in those lips tightened by cruel malice, like a spring ready to fly back and launch forth blasphemy and sarcasm; he plunges into the mud, rolls in it, drinks of it; he surrenders his imagination to the enthusiasm of hell, which lends him all its forces; Paris crowned him, Sodom would have banished him.<sup>1</sup> Locke, again, did not understand

<sup>1</sup> *Soirées de Saint Pétersbourg* (8th ed. 1862), vol. i. pp. 238-243.

himself. His distinguishing characteristics are feebleness and precipitancy of judgment. Vagueness and irresolution reign in his expressions as they do in his thoughts. He constantly exhibits that most decisive sign of mediocrity—he passes close by the greatest questions without perceiving them. In the study of philosophy, contempt for Locke is the beginning of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Condillac was even more vigilantly than anybody else on his guard against his own conscience. But Hume was perhaps the most dangerous and the most guilty of all these mournful writers who will for ever accuse the last century before posterity—the one who employed the most talent with the most coolness to do most harm.<sup>2</sup> To Bacon De Maistre paid the compliment of composing a long refutation of his main ideas, in which Bacon's blindness, presumption, profanity, and scientific charlatanry are denounced in vehement and almost coarse terms, and treated as the natural outcome of a low morality.

It has long been the inglorious speciality of the theological school to insist in this way upon moral depravity as an antecedent condition of intellectual error. De Maistre in this respect was not unworthy of his fellows. He believed that his opponents were even worse citizens than they were bad philosophers, and it was his horror of them in the former capacity that made him so bitter and resentful against them in

<sup>1</sup> *Soirées de Saint Pétersbourg, 6ième entretien*, i. 397-442.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* (8th ed. 1862) vol. i. p. 408.

the latter. He could think of no more fitting image for opinions that he did not happen to believe than counterfeit money, 'which is struck in the first instance by great criminals, and is afterwards passed on by honest folk who perpetuate the crime without knowing what they do.' A philosopher of the highest class, we may be sure, does not permit himself to be drawn down from the true object of his meditations by these sinister emotions. But De Maistre belonged emphatically to minds of the second order, whose eagerness to find truth is never intense and pure enough to raise them above perturbing antipathies to persons. His whole attitude was fatal to his claim to be heard as a truth-seeker in any right sense of the term. He was not only persuaded of the general justice and inexpugnableness of the orthodox system, but he refused to believe that it was capable of being improved or supplemented by anything which a temperate and fair examination of other doctrines might peradventure be found to yield. With De Maistre there was no peradventure. Again, no speculative mind of the highest order ever mistakes, or ever moves systematically apart from, the main current of the social movement of its time. It is implied in the very definition of a thinker of supreme quality that he should detect, and be in a certain accord with, the most forward and central of the ruling tendencies of his epoch. Three-quarters of a century have elapsed since De Maistre was driven to attempt to explain the world to himself, and this interval has

sufficed to show that the central conditions at that time for the permanent reorganisation of the society which had just been so violently rent in pieces, were assuredly not theological, military, nor ultramontane, but the very opposite of all these.

There was a second consequence of the conditions of the time. The catastrophe of Europe affected the matter as well as the manner of contemporary speculation. The French Revolution has become to us no more than a term, though the strangest term in a historic series. To some of the best of those who were confronted on every side by its tumult and agitation, it was the prevailing of the gates of hell, the moral disruption of the universe, the absolute and total surrender of the world to them that plough iniquity and sow wickedness. Even under ordinary circumstances few men have gone through life without encountering some triumphant iniquity, some gross and prolonged cruelty, which makes them wonder how God should allow such things to be. If we remember the aspect which the Revolution wore in the eyes of those who seeing it yet did not understand, we can imagine what dimensions this eternal enigma must have assumed in their sight. It was inevitable that the first problem to press on men with resistless urgency should be the ancient question of the method of the Creator's temporal government. What is the law of the distribution of good and evil fortune? How can we vindicate with regard to the conditions of this life, the different destinies that fall to men?

How can we defend the moral ordering of a world in which the wicked and godless constantly triumph, while the virtuous and upright who retain their integrity are as frequently buffeted and put to shame?

This tremendous question has never been presented with such sublimity of expression, such noble simplicity and force of thought, as in the majestic and touching legend of Job. But its completeness, as a presentation of the human tragedy, is impaired by the excessive prosperity which is finally supposed to reward the patient hero for his fortitude. Job received twice as much as he had before, and his latter end was blessed more than his beginning. In the chronicles of actual history men fare not so. There is a terribly logical finish about some of the dealings of fate, and in life the working of a curse is seldom stayed by any dramatic necessity for a smooth consummation. Destiny is no artist. The facts that confront us are relentless. No statement of the case is adequate which maintains, by ever so delicate an implication, that in the long run and somehow it is well in temporal things with the just, and ill with the unjust. Until we have firmly looked in the face the grim truth that temporal rewards and punishments do not follow the possession or the want of spiritual or moral virtue, so long we are still ignorant what that enigma is, which speculative men, from the author of the book of Job downwards, have striven to resolve. We can readily imagine the fulness with which the question

would grow up in the mind of a royalist and Catholic exile at the end of the eighteenth century.

Nothing can be more clearly put than De Maistre's answers to the question which the circumstances of the time placed before him to solve. What is the law of the distribution of good and evil fortune in this life? Is it a moral law? Do prosperity and adversity fall respectively to the just and the unjust, either individually or collectively? Has the ancient covenant been faithfully kept, that whoso hearkens diligently to the divine voice, and observes all the commandments to do them, shall be blessed in his basket and his store and in all the work of his hand? Or is God a God that hideth himself?

De Maistre perceived that the optimistic conception of the deity as benign, merciful, infinitely forgiving, was very far indeed from covering the facts. So he insisted on seeing in human destiny the ever-present hand of a stern and terrible judge, administering a Draconian code with blind and pitiless severity. God created men under conditions which left them free to choose between good and evil. All the physical evil that exists in the world is a penalty for the moral evil that has resulted from the abuse by men of this freedom of choice. For these physical calamities God is only responsible in the way in which a criminal judge is responsible for a hanging. Men cannot blame the judge for the gallows; the fault is their own in committing those offences for which hanging is prescribed beforehand as the penalty. These curses

which dominate human life are not the result of the cruelty of the divine ruler, but of the folly and wickedness of mankind, who, seeing the better course, yet deliberately choose the worse. The order of the world is overthrown by the iniquities of men; it is we who have provoked the exercise of the divine justice, and called down the tokens of his vengeance. The misery and disaster that surround us like a cloak are the penalty of our crimes and the price of our expiation. As the divine St. Thomas has said: *Deus est auctor mali quod est poena, non autem mali quod est culpa*. There is a certain quantity of wrong done over the face of the world; therefore the great Judge exacts a proportionate quantity of punishment. The total amount of evil suffered makes nice equation with the total amount of evil done; the extent of human suffering tallies precisely with the extent of human guilt. Of course you must take original sin into account, 'which explains all, and without which you can explain nothing.' 'In virtue of this primitive degradation we are subject to all sorts of physical sufferings *in general*; just as in virtue of this same degradation we are subject to all sorts of vices *in general*. This original malady therefore [which is the correlative of original sin] has no other name. It is only the capacity of suffering all evils, as original sin is only the capacity of committing all crimes.'<sup>1</sup> Hence all calamity is either the punishment of sins actually committed by the sufferers, or else it is the general

<sup>1</sup> *Soirées*, i. 76.

analogy exacted for general sinfulness. Sometimes an innocent being is stricken, and a guilty being appears to escape. But is it not the same in the transactions of earthly tribunals? And yet we do not say that they are conducted without regard to justice and righteousness. 'When God punishes any society for the crimes that it has committed, he does justice as we do justice ourselves in these sorts of circumstance. A city revolts; it massacres the representatives of the sovereign; it shuts its gates against him; it defends itself against his arms; it is taken. The prince has it dismantled and deprived of all its privileges; nobody will find fault with this decision on the ground that there are innocent persons shut up in the city.'<sup>1</sup>

De Maistre's deity is thus a colossal Septembriseur, enthroned high in the peaceful heavens, demanding

<sup>1</sup> De Maistre found a curiously characteristic kind of support for this view in the fact that evils are called *fléaux*: flails are things to beat with: so evils must be things with which men are beaten; and as we should not be beaten if we did not deserve it, *argal*, suffering is a merited punishment. Apart from that common infirmity which leads people after they have discovered an analogy between two things, to argue from the properties of the one to those of the other, as if, instead of being analogous, they were identical, De Maistre was particularly fond of inferring moral truths from etymologies. He has an argument for the deterioration of man, drawn from the fact that the Romans expressed in the same word, *supplicium*, the two ideas of prayer and punishment (*Soirées, 2ième entretien*, i. p. 108). His profundity as an etymologist may be gathered from his analysis of *cadaver*: *ca-ro, da-ta, ver-mibus*. There are many others of the same quality.



ever-renewed holocausts in the name of the public safety.

It is true, as a general rule of the human mind, that the objects which men have worshipped have improved in morality and wisdom as men themselves have improved. The quiet gods, without effort of their own, have grown holier and purer by the agitations and toil which civilise their worshippers. In other words, the same influences which elevate and widen our sense of human duty give corresponding height and nobleness to our ideas of the divine character. The history of the civilisation of the earth is the history of the civilisation of Olympus also. It will be seen that the deity whom De Maistre sets up is below the moral level of the time in respect of Punishment. In intellectual matters he vehemently proclaimed the superiority of the tenth or the twelfth over the eighteenth century, but it is surely carrying admiration for those loyal times indecently far, to seek in the vindictive sackings of revolted towns, and the miscellaneous butcheries of men, women, and babes, which then marked the vengeance of outraged sovereignty, the most apt parallel and analogy for the systematic administration of human society by its Creator. Such punishment can no longer be regarded as moral in any deep or permanent sense ; it implies a gross, harsh, and revengeful character in the executioner, that is eminently perplexing and incredible to those who expect to find an idea of justice in the government of the world, at least not materially

below what is attained in the clumsy efforts of uninspired publicists.

In mere point of administration, the criminal code which De Maistre put into the hands of the Supreme Being works in a more arbitrary and capricious manner than any device of an Italian Bourbon. As Voltaire asks—

*Lisbonne, qui n'est plus, eut-elle plus de vices  
Que Londres, que Paris, plongés dans les délices ?  
Lisbonne est abîmée, et l'on danse à Paris.*

Stay, De Maistre replies, look at Paris thirty years later, not dancing, but red with blood. This kind of thing is often said, even now ; but it is really time to abandon the prostitution of the name of Justice to a process which brings Lewis XVI. to the block, and consigns De Maistre to poverty and exile, because Lewis XIV., the Regent, and Lewis XV. had been profligate men or injudicious rulers. The reader may remember how the unhappy Emperor Maurice as his five innocent sons were in turn murdered before his eyes, at each stroke piously ejaculated : 'Thou art just, O Lord ! and thy judgments are righteous.'<sup>1</sup> Any name would befit this kind of transaction better than that which, in the dealings of men with one another at least, we reserve for the honourable anxiety that he should reap who has sown, that the reward should be to him who has toiled for it, and the pain to him who has deliberately incurred it.

<sup>1</sup> *Gibbon*, c. xlv. vol. v. 385.

What is gained by attributing to the divine government a method tainted with every quality that could vitiate the enactment of penalties by a temporal sovereign?

We need not labour this part of the discussion further. Though conducted with much brilliance and vigour by De Maistre, it is not his most important nor remarkable contribution to thought. Before passing on to that, it is worth while to make one remark. It will be inferred from De Maistre's general position that he was no friend to physical science. Just as moderns see in the advance of the method and boundaries of physical knowledge the most direct and sure means of displacing the unfruitful subjective methods of old, and so of renovating the entire field of human thought and activity, so did De Maistre see, as his school has seen since, that here was the stronghold of his foes. 'Ah, how dearly,' he exclaimed, 'has man paid for the natural sciences! Not but that Providence designed that man should know something about them; only it must be in due order. The ancients were not permitted to attain much or even any sound knowledge of physics, indisputably above us as they were in force of mind, a fact shown by the superiority of their language which ought to silence for ever the voice of modern pride. Why did the ancients remain ignorant of natural science? Because they were not Christian. 'When all Europe was Christian, when all the priests were the universal teachers, when all t

establishments of Europe were Christianised, when theology had taken its place at the head of all instruction, and the other faculties were ranged around her like maids of honour round their queen, the human race being thus prepared, then the natural sciences were given to it.' Science must be kept in its place, for it resembles fire which, when confined in the grates prepared for it, is the most useful and powerful of man's servants; scattered about anyhow, it is the most terrible of scourges. Whence the marked supremacy of the seventeenth century, especially in France? From the happy accord of religion, science, and chivalry, and from the supremacy conceded to the first. The more perfect theology is in a country the more fruitful it is in true science; and that is why Christian nations have surpassed all others in the sciences, and that is why the Indians and Chinese will never reach us, so long as we remain respectively as we are. The more theology is cultivated, honoured, and supreme, then, other things being equal, the more perfect will human science be: that is to say, it will have the greater force and expansion, and will be the more free from every mischievous and perilous connection.<sup>1</sup>

Little would be gained here by serious criticism of a view of this kind from a positive point. How little, the reader will understand from De Maistre's own explanations of his principles of Proof and Evidence. 'They have called to witness against Moses,' he says,

<sup>1</sup> See the *Examen de la Philosophie de Bacon*, vol. ii. 53 et seq.

'history, chronology, astronomy, geology, etc. The objections have disappeared before true science; but those were profoundly wise who despised them before any inquiry, or who only examined them in order to discover a refutation, but without ever doubting that there was one. Even a mathematical objection ought to be despised, for though it may be a demonstrated truth, still you will never be able to demonstrate that it contradicts a truth that has been demonstrated before.' His final formula he boldly announced in these words: '*Que toutes les fois qu'une proposition sera prouvée par le genre de preuve qui lui appartient, l'objection quelconque, MÊME INSOLUBLE, ne doit plus être écoutée.*' Suppose, for example, that by a consensus of testimony it were perfectly proved that Archimedes set fire to the fleet of Marcellus by a burning-glass; then all the objections of geometry disappear. Prove if you can, and if you choose, that by certain laws a glass, in order to be capable of setting fire to the Roman fleet, must have been as big as the whole city of Syracuse, and ask me what answer I have to make to that. '*J'ai à vous répondre qu'Archimède brûla la flotte romaine avec un miroir ardent.*'

The interesting thing about such opinions as these is not the exact height and depth of their falseness, but the considerations which could recommend them to a man of so much knowledge, both of books and of the outer facts of life, and of so much natural acuteness as De Maistre. Persons who have accustomed themselves to ascertained methods of proof, are apt

to look on a man who vows that if a thing has been declared true by some authority whom he respects, then that constitutes proof to him, as either the victim of a preposterous and barely credible infatuation, or else as a flat impostor. Yet De Maistre was no ignorant monk. He had no selfish or official interest in taking away the keys of knowledge, entering not in himself, and them that would enter in hindering. The true reasons for his detestation of the eighteenth-century philosophers, science, and literature, are simple enough. Like every wise man, he felt that the end of all philosophy and science is emphatically social, the construction and maintenance and improvement of a fabric under which the communities of men may find shelter, and may secure all the conditions for living their lives with dignity and service. Then he held that no truth can be harmful to society. If he found any system of opinions, any given attitude of the mind, injurious to tranquillity and the public order, he instantly concluded that, however plausible they might seem when tested by logic and demonstration, they were fundamentally untrue and deceptive. What is logic compared with eternal salvation in the next world, and the practice of virtue in this? The recommendation of such a mind as De Maistre's is the intensity of its appreciation of order and social happiness. The obvious weakness of such a mind, and the curse inherent in its influence, is that it overlooks the prime condition of all; that social order can never be established on a durable basis so long as the



umstances were widely different. The practical question in both cases was just the same—how to establish a stable social order which, resting on principles that should command the assent of all, might secure the co-operation of all for its harmonious and efficient maintenance, and might offer a firm basis for the highest and best life that the moral and intellectual state of the time allowed. There were two courses open, or which seemed to be open, in this gigantic enterprise of reconstructing a society. One of them was to treat the case of the eighteenth century as if it were not merely similar to, but exactly identical with, the case of the fifth, and as if exactly the same forces which had knit Western Europe together into a compact civilisation a thousand years before, would again suffice for a second consolidation. Christianity, rising with the zeal and strength of youth out of the ruins of the Empire, and feudalism by the need of self-preservation imposing a form upon the unshapen associations of the barbarians, had between them compacted the foundations and reared the fabric of mediæval life. Why, many men asked themselves, should not Christian and feudal ideas repeat their great achievement, and be the means of reorganising the system which a blind rebellion against them had thrown into deplorable and fatal confusion? Let the century which had come to such an end be regarded as a mysteriously intercalated episode, and no more, in the long drama of faith and sovereign order. Let it pass as a sombre and pestilent stream, whose foun-



tains no man should discover, whose waters had for a season mingled with the mightier current of the divinely allotted destiny of the race, and had then gathered themselves apart and flowed off, to end as they had begun, in the stagnation and barrenness of the desert. Philosophers and men of letters, astronomers and chemists, atheists and republicans, had shown that they were only powerful to destroy, as the Goths and the Vandals had been. They had shown that they were impotent, as the Goths and the Vandals had been, in building up again. Let men turn their faces, then, once more to that system by which in the ancient times Europe had been delivered from a relapse into eternal night.

The second course was very different from this. The minds to whom it commended itself were cast in a different mould and drew their inspiration from other traditions. In their view the system which the Church had been the main agency in organising, had fallen quite as much from its own irremediable weakness as from the direct onslaughts of assailants within and without. The barbarians had rushed in, it was true, in 1793; but this time it was the Church and feudalism which were in the position of the old empire on whose ruins they had built. What had once restored order and belief to the West, was now in its own turn overtaken by decay and dissolution. To look to them to unite these new barbarians in a stable and vigorous civilisation, because they had organised Europe of old, was as infatuated as it would

have been to expect the later emperors to equal the exploits of the Republic and their greatest predecessors in the purple. To despise philosophers and men of science was only to play over again in a new dress the very part which Julian had enacted in the face of nascent Christianity. The eighteenth century, instead of being that home of malaria which the Catholic and Royalist party represented, was in truth the seed-ground of a new and better future. Its ideas were to furnish the material and the implements by which should be repaired the terrible breaches and chasms in European order that had been made alike by despots and Jacobins, by priests and atheists, by aristocrats and sans-culottes. Amidst all the demolition upon which its leading minds had been so zealously bent, they had been animated by the warmest love of social justice, of human freedom, of equal lights, and by the most fervent and sincere longing to make a nobler happiness more universally attainable by all the children of men. It was to these great principles that we ought eagerly to turn, to liberty, to equality, to brotherhood, if we wished to achieve before the new invaders a work of civilisation and social reconstruction, such as Catholicism and feudalism had achieved for the multitudinous invaders of old.

Such was the difference which divided opinion when men took heart to survey the appalling scene of moral desolation that the cataclysm of '93 had left behind. We may admire the courage of either

school. For if the conscience of the Liberals was oppressed by the sanguinary tragedy in which freedom and brotherhood and justice had been consummated, the Catholic and the Royalist were just as sorely burdened with the weight of kingly basenesses and priestly hypocrisies. If the one had some difficulty in interpreting Jacobinism and the Terror, the other was still more severely pressed to interpret the fact and origin and meaning of the Revolution; if the Liberal had Marat and Hébert, the Royalist had Lewis xv., and the Catholic had Dubois and De Rohan. Each school could intrepidly hurl back the taunts of its enemy, and neither of them did full justice to the strong side of the other. Yet we who are, in England at all events, removed a little aside from the centre of this great battle, may perceive that at that time both of the contending hosts fought under honourable banners, and could inscribe upon their shields a rational and intelligible device. Indeed, unless the modern Liberal admits the strength inherent in the cause of his enemies, it is impossible for him to explain to himself the duration and obstinacy of the conflict, the slow advance and occasional repulse of the host in which he has enlisted, and the tardy progress that Liberalism has made in that stupendous reconstruction which the Revolution has forced the modern political thinker to meditate upon, and the modern statesman to further and control.

De Maistre, from those general ideas as to the method of the government of the world, of which

we have already seen something, had formed what he conceived to be a perfectly satisfactory way of accounting for the eighteenth century and its terrific climax. The will of man is left free; he acts contrary to the will of God; and then God exacts the shedding of blood as the penalty. So much for the past. The only hope of the future lay in an immediate return to the system which God himself had established, and in the restoration of that spiritual power which had presided over the reconstruction of Europe in darker and more chaotic times than even these. Though, perhaps, he nowhere expresses himself on this point in a distinct formula, De Maistre was firmly impressed with the idea of historic unity and continuity. He looked upon the history of the West in its integrity, and was entirely free from anything like that disastrous kind of misconception which makes the English Protestant treat the long period between St. Paul and Martin Luther as a howling waste, or which makes some Americans omit from all account the still longer period of human effort from the crucifixion of Christ to the Declaration of Independence. The rise of the vast structure of Western civilisation during and after the dissolution of the Empire, presented itself to his mind as a single and uniform process, though marked in portions by temporary, casual, parenthetical interruptions, due to depraved will and disordered pride. All the dangers to which this civilisation had been exposed in its infancy and growth were before his eyes. First, there were the

heresies with which the subtle and debased ingenuity of the Greeks had stained and distorted the great but simple mysteries of the faith. Then came the hordes of invaders from the North, sweeping with irresistible force over regions that the weakness or cowardice of the wearers of the purple left defenceless before them. Before the northern tribes had settled in their possessions, and had full time to assimilate the faith and the institutions which they had found there, the growing organisation was menaced by a more deadly peril in the incessant and steady advance of the bloody and fanatical tribes from the East. And in this way De Maistre's mind continued the picture down to the latest days of all, when there had arisen men who, denying God and mocking at Christ, were bent on the destruction of the very foundations of society, and had nothing better to offer the human race than a miserable return to a state of nature.

As he thus reproduced this long drama, one benign and central figure was ever present, changeless in the midst of ceaseless change; laboriously building up with preterhuman patience and preterhuman sagacity, when other powers, one after another in evil succession, were madly raging to destroy and to pull down; thinking only of the great interests of order and civilisation, of which it had been constituted the eternal protector, and showing its divine origin and inspiration alike by its unfailing wisdom and its unfailing benevolence. It is the Sovereign Pontiff

who thus stands forth throughout the history of Europe, as the great Demiurgus of universal civilisation. If the Pope had filled only such a position as the Patriarch held at Constantinople, or if there had been no Pope, and Christianity had depended exclusively on the East for its propagation, with no great spiritual organ in the West, what would have become of Western development? It was the energy and resolution of the Pontiffs which resisted the heresies of the East, and preserved to the Christian religion that plainness and intelligibility, without which it would never have made a way to the rude understanding and simple hearts of the barbarians from the North. It was their wise patriotism which protected Italy against Greek oppression, and by acting the part of mayors of the palace to the decrepit Eastern emperors, it was they who contrived to preserve the independence and maintain the fabric of society until the appearance of the Carlovingians, in whom, with the rapid instinct of true statesmen, they at once recognised the founders of a new empire of the West. If the Popes, again, had possessed over the Eastern empire the same authority that they had over the Western, they would have repulsed not only the Saracens, but the Turks too, and none of the evils which these nations have inflicted on us would ever have taken place.<sup>1</sup> Even as it was, when the Saracens

<sup>1</sup> De Maistre forgot or underestimated the services of Leo the Isaurian whose repulse of the Caliph's forces at Constantinople (A.D. 717) was perhaps as important for Europe as the more

threatened the West, the Popes were the chief agents in organising resistance, and giving spirit and animation to the defenders of Europe. Their alert vision saw that to crush for ever that formidable enemy, it was not enough to defend ourselves against his assaults; we must attack him at home. The Crusades, vulgarly treated as the wars of a blind and superstitious piety, were in truth wars of high policy. From the Council of Clermont down to the famous day of Lepanto, the hand and spirit of the Pontiff were to be traced in every part of that tremendous struggle which prevented Europe from being handed over to the tyranny, ignorance, and barbarism that have always been the inevitable fruits of Mahometan conquest, and had already stamped out civilisation in Asia Minor and Palestine and Greece, once the very garden of the universe.

This admirable and politic heroism of the Popes in the face of foes pressing from without, De Maistre found more than equalled by their wisdom, courage, and activity in organising and developing the elements of a civilised system within. The maxim of old societies had been that which Lucan puts into the mouth of Cæsar—*humanum paucis vivit genus*. A vast population of slaves had been one of the inevitable social conditions of the period: the Popes never rested from their endeavours to banish servitude from among

renowned victory of Charles Martel. But then Leo was an Iconoclast and heretic. Cf. Finlay's *Byzantine Empire*, pp. 22, 23.

Christian nations. Women in old societies had filled a mean and degraded place: it was reserved for the new spiritual power to rescue the race from that vicious circle in which men had debased the nature of women, and women had given back all the weakness and perversity they had received from men, and to perceive that 'the most effectual way of perfecting the man is to ennoble and exalt the woman.' The organisation of the priesthood, again, was a masterpiece of practical wisdom. Such an order, removed from the fierce or selfish interests of ordinary life by the holy regulation of celibacy, and by the austere discipline of the Church, was indispensable in the midst of such a society as that which it was the function of the Church to guide. Who but the members of an order thus set apart, acting in strict subordination to the central power, and so presenting a front of unbroken spiritual unity, could have held their way among tumultuous tribes, half-barbarous nobles, and proud and unruly kings, protesting against wrong, passionately inculcating new and higher ideas of right, denouncing the darkness of the false gods, calling on all men to worship the cross and adore the mysteries of the true God? Compare now the impotency of the Protestant missionary, squatting in gross comfort with wife and babes among the savages he has come to convert, preaching a disputatious doctrine, wrangling openly with the rival sent by some other sect—compare this impotency with the success that follows the devoted sons of the Church, impressing



their proselytes with the mysterious virtue of their continence, the self-denial of their lives, the unity of their dogma and their rites; and then recognise the wisdom of these great churchmen who created a priesthood after this manner in the days when every priest was as the missionary is now. Finally, it was the occupants of the holy chair who prepared, softened, one might almost say sweetened, the occupants of thrones; it was to them that Providence had confided the education of the sovereigns of Europe. The Popes brought up the youth of the European monarchy; they made it precisely in the same way in which Fénelon made the Duke of Burgundy. In each case the task consisted in eradicating from a fine character an element of ferocity that would have ruined all. 'Everything that constrains a man strengthens him. He cannot obey without perfecting himself; and by the mere fact of overcoming himself he is better. Any man will vanquish the most violent passion at thirty, because at five or six you have taught him of his own will to give up a plaything or a sweetmeat. That came to pass to the monarchy, which happens to an individual who has been well brought up. The continued efforts of the Church, directed by the Sovereign Pontiff, did what had never been seen before, and what will never be seen again where that authority is not recognised. Insensibly, without threats or laws or battles, without violence and without resistance, the great European charter was proclaimed, not on paper nor by the voice of public

criers; but in all European hearts, then all Catholic Kings surrender the power of judging by themselves, and nations in return declare kings infallible and inviolable. Such is the fundamental law of the European monarchy, and it is the work of the Popes.<sup>1</sup>

All this, however, is only the external development of De Maistre's central idea, the historical corroboration of a truth to which he conducts us in the first instance by general considerations. Assuming, what it is less and less characteristic of the present century at any rate to deny, that Christianity was the only actual force by which the regeneration of Europe could be effected after the decline of the Roman civilisation, he insists that, as he again and again expresses it, 'without the Pope there is no veritable Christianity.' What he meant by this condensed form needs a little explanation, as is always the case with such simple statements of the products of long and complex reasoning. In saying that without the Pope there is no true Christianity, what he considered himself as having established was, that unless there be some supreme and independent possessor of authority to settle doctrine, to regulate discipline, to give authentic counsel, to apply accepted principles to disputed cases, then there can be no such thing as religious system which shall have power to bind the members of a vast and not homogeneous body in the salutary bonds of a common civilisation, nor to guide and inform an universal conscience. In each individual

<sup>1</sup> *De Pape*, bk. iii. c. iv. p. 298 (ed. 1866).

state everybody admits the absolute necessity of having some sovereign power which shall make, declare, and administer the laws, and from whose action in any one of these aspects there shall be no appeal; a power that shall be strong enough to protect the rights and enforce the duties which it has authoritatively proclaimed and enjoined. In free England, as in despotic Turkey, the privileges and obligations which the law tolerates or imposes, and all the benefits which their existence confers on the community, are the creatures and conditions of a supreme authority from which there is no appeal, whether the instrument by which this authority makes its will known be an act of parliament or a ukase. This conception of temporal sovereignty, especially familiarised to our generation by the teaching of Austin, was carried by De Maistre into discussions upon the limits of the Papal power with great ingenuity and force, and, if we accept the premisses, with great success.

It should be said here, that throughout his book on the Pope, De Maistre talks of Christianity exclusively as a statesman or a publicist would talk about it; not theologically nor spiritually, but politically and socially. The question with which he concerns himself is the utilisation of Christianity as a force to shape and organise a system of civilised societies; a study of the conditions under which this utilisation had taken place in the earlier centuries of the era; and a deduction from them of the conditions under which we might ensure a repetition of the process in

changed modern circumstance. In the eighteenth century men were accustomed to ask of Christianity, as Protestants always ask of so much of Catholicism as they have dropped, whether or no it is true. But after the Révolution the question changed, and became an inquiry whether and how Christianity could contribute to the reconstruction of society. People asked less how true it was, than how strong it was; less how many unquestioned dogmas, than how much social weight it had or could develop; less as to the precise amount and form of belief that would save a soul, than as to the way in which it might be expected to assist the European community.

It was the strength of this temper in him which led to his extraordinary detestation and contempt for the Greeks. Their turn for pure speculation excited all his anger. In a curious chapter, he exhausts invective in denouncing them.<sup>1</sup> The sarcasm of Sallust delights him, that the actions of Greece were very fine, *verum aliquanto minores quam fama feruntur*. Their military glory was only a flash of about a hundred and fourteen years from Marathon; compare this with the prolonged splendour of Rome, France, and England. In philosophy they displayed decent talent, but even here their true merit is to have brought the wisdom of Asia into Europe, for they invented nothing. Greece was the home of syllogism and of unreason. 'Read Plato: at every page you will draw a striking distinction. As often as he is Greek,

<sup>1</sup> *Du Pape*, bk. iv. c. vii.

he wearies you. He is only great, sublime, penetrating, when he is a theologian; in other words, when he is announcing positive and everlasting dogmas, free from all quibble, and which are so clearly marked with the eastern cast, that not to perceive it one must never have had a glimpse of Asia. . . . There was in him a sophist and a theologian, or, if you choose, a Greek and a Chaldean.' The Athenians could never pardon one of their great leaders, all of whom fell victims in one shape or another to a temper frivolous as that of a child, ferocious as that of men,—'*espèce de moutons enragés, toujours menés par la nature, et toujours par nature dévorant leurs bergers.*' As for their oratory, 'the tribune of Athens would have been the disgrace of mankind if Phocion and men like him, by occasionally ascending it before drinking the hemlock or setting out for their place of exile, had not in some sort balanced such a mass of loquacity, extravagance, and cruelty.'<sup>1</sup>

It is very important to remember this constant solicitude for ideas that should work well, in con-

<sup>1</sup> A remark of Mr. Finlay's is worth quoting here. 'The Greeks,' he says, 'had at times only a secondary share in the ecclesiastical controversies in the Eastern Church, though the circumstance of these controversies having been carried on in the Greek language has made the natives of Western Europe attribute them to a philosophic, speculative, and polemic spirit, inherent in the Hellenic mind. A very slight examination of history is sufficient to prove that several of the heresies which disturbed the Eastern Church had their origin in the more profound religious ideas of the oriental nations, and that many of the opinions called heretical were in a great measure expressions

nection with that book of De Maistre's which has had most influence in Europe, by supplying a base for the theories of ultramontanist. Unless we perceive very clearly that throughout his ardent speculations on the Papal power his mind was bent upon enforcing the practical solution of a pressing social problem, we easily misunderstand him and underrate what he had to say. A charge has been forcibly urged against him by an eminent English critic, for example, that he has confounded supremacy with infallibility, than which, as the writer truly says, no two ideas can be more perfectly distinct, one being superiority of force, and the other incapacity of error.<sup>1</sup> De Maistre made logical blunders in abundance quite as bad as this, but he was too acute, I think, deliberately to erect so elaborate a structure upon a confusion so very obvious, and that must have stared him in the face from the first page of his work to the last. If we look upon his book as a mere general defence of the Papacy, designed to investigate and fortify all its pretensions one by one, we should have great right to complain against having two claims so essentially divergent,

of the mental nationality of the Syrians, Armenians, Egyptians, and Persians, and had no conception whatever with the Greek mind.'—*Byzantine Empire, from 716 to 1057*, p. 262.

The same writer (p. 263) remarks very truly, that 'the religious or theological portion of Popery, as a section of the Christian Church, is really Greek; and it is only the ecclesiastical, political, and theoretic peculiarities of the fabric which can be considered as the work of the Latin Church.'

<sup>1</sup> Sir J. Fitzjames Stephen in the *Saturday Review*, Sept. 9, 1865, p. 334.

treated as though they were the same thing, or could be held in their places by the same supports. But let us regard the treatise on the Pope not as meant to convince free-thinkers or Protestants that divine grace inspires every decree of the Holy Father, though that would have been the right view of it if it had been written fifty years earlier. It was composed within the first twenty years of the present century, when the universe, to men of De Maistre's stamp, seemed once more without form and void. His object, as he tells us more than once, was to find a way of restoring a religion and a morality in Europe; of giving to truth the forces demanded for the conquests that she was meditating; of strengthening the thrones of sovereigns, and of gently calming that general fermentation of spirit which threatened mightier evils than any that had yet overwhelmed society. From this point of view we shall see that the distinction between supremacy and infallibility was not worth recognising.

Practically, he says, 'infallibility is only a consequence of supremacy, or rather it is absolutely the same thing under two different names. . . . In effect it is the same thing, *in practice*, not to be subject to error, and not to be liable to be accused of it. Thus, even if we should agree that no divine promise was made to the Pope, he would not be less infallible or deemed so, as the final tribunal; for every judgment from which you cannot appeal is and must be (*est et doit être*) held for just in every human association, under any imaginable form of government; and

every true statesman will understand me perfectly, when I say that the point is to ascertain not only if the Sovereign Pontiff is, but if he must be, infallible.<sup>1</sup> In another place he says distinctly enough that the infallibility of the Church has two aspects; in one of them it is the object of divine promise, in the other it is a human implication, and that in the latter aspect infallibility is supposed in the Church, just 'as we are absolutely bound to suppose it, even in temporal sovereignties (where it does not really exist), under pain of seeing society dissolved.' The Church only demands what other sovereignties demand, though she has the immense superiority over them of having her claim backed by direct promise from heaven.<sup>2</sup> Take away the dogma, if you will, he says, and only consider the thing politically, which is exactly what he really does all through the book. The pope, from this point of view, asks for no other infallibility than that which is attributed to all sovereigns.<sup>3</sup> Without either vindicating or surrendering the supernatural side of the Papal claims, he only insists upon the political, social, or human side of it, as an inseparable quality of an admitted supremacy.<sup>4</sup> In short, from beginning to end of this

<sup>1</sup> *De Pape*, bk. i. c. i. p. 17.    <sup>2</sup> *Ib.* bk. i. c. xix. pp. 124, 125.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* bk. i. c. xvi. p. 111.

<sup>4</sup> '*Il n'y a point de souveraineté qui pour le bonheur des hommes, et pour le sien surtout, ne soit bornée de quelque manière, mais dans l'intérieur de ces bornes, placées comme il plaît à Dieu, elle est toujours et partout absolue et tenue pour infaillible. Et quand je parle de l'exercice légitime de la souveraineté, je*



speculation, from which the best kind of ultramontan-ism has drawn its defence, he evinces a deprecatory anxiety—a very rare temper with De Maistre—not to fight on the issue of the dogma of infallibility over which Protestants and unbelievers have won an infinite number of cheap victories ; that he leaves as a theme more fitted for the disputations of theologians. My position, he seems to keep saying, is that if the Pope is spiritually supreme, then he is virtually and practically *as if he were* infallible, just in the same sense in which the English Parliament and monarch, and the Russian Czar, are as if they were infallible. But let us not argue so much about this, which is only secondary. The main question is whether without the Pope there can be a true Christianity, ‘that is to say, a Christianity, active, powerful, converting, regenerating, conquering, perfecting.’

De Maistre was probably conducted to his theory by an analogy, which he tacitly leaned upon more strongly than it could well bear, between temporal organisation and spiritual organisation. In inchoate communities, the momentary self-interest and the promptly stirred passions of men would rend the

*n'entends point ou je ne dis point l'exercice juste, ce qui produirait une amphibologie dangereuse, à moins que par ce dernier mot on ne veuille dire que tout ce qu'elle opine dans son cercle est juste ou tenu pour tel, ce qui est la vérité. C'est ainsi qu'un tribunal suprême, tant qu'il ne sort pas de ses attributions, est toujours juste ; car c'est la même chose DANS LA PRATIQUE, d'être infaillible, ou de se tromper sans appel.*—Bk. ii. c. xi. p. 212 (footnote).

growing society in pieces, unless they were restrained by the strong hand of law in some shape or other, written or unwritten, and administered by an authority, either physically too strong to be resisted, or else set up by the common consent seeking to further the general convenience. To divide this authority, so that none should know where to look for a sovereign decree, nor be able to ascertain the commands of sovereign law ; to embody it in the persons of many discordant expounders, each assuming oracular weight and equal sanction ; to leave individuals to administer and interpret it for themselves, and to decide among themselves its application to their own cases ; what would this be but a deliberate preparation for anarchy and dissolution ? For it is one of the clear conditions of the efficacy of the social union, that every member of it should be able to know for certain the terms on which he belongs to it, the compliances which it will insist upon in him, and the compliances which it will in turn permit him to insist upon in others, and therefore it is indispensable that there should be some definite and admitted centre where this very essential knowledge should be accessible.

Some such reflections as these must have been at the bottom of De Maistre's great apology for the Papal supremacy, or at any rate they may serve to bring before our minds with greater clearness the kind of foundations on which his scheme rested. For law substitute Christianity, for social union spiritual union, for legal obligations the obligations

of the faith. Instead of individuals bound together by allegiance to common political institutions, conceive communities united in the bonds of religious brotherhood into a sort of universal republic, under the moderate supremacy of a supreme spiritual power. As a matter of fact, it was the intervention of this spiritual power which restrained the anarchy, internal and external, of the ferocious and imperfectly organised sovereignties that figure in the early history of modern Europe. And as a matter of theory, what could be more rational and defensible than such an intervention made systematic, with its rightfulness and disinterestedness universally recognised? Grant Christianity as the spiritual basis of the life and action of modern communities; supporting both the organised structure of each of them, and the interdependent system composed of them all; accepted by the individual members of each, and by the integral bodies forming the whole. But who shall declare what the Christian doctrine is, and how its maxims bear upon special cases, and what oracles they announce in particular sets of circumstances? Amid the turbulence of popular passion, in face of the crushing despotism of an insensate tyrant, between the furious hatred of jealous nations or the violent ambition of rival sovereigns, what likelihood would there be of either party to the contention yielding tranquilly and promptly to any presentation of Christian teaching made by the other, or by some suspected neutral as a decisive authority between them? Obviously there

must be some supreme and indisputable interpreter, before whose final decree the tyrant should quail, the flood of popular lawlessness flow back within its accustomed banks, and contending sovereigns or jealous nations fraternally embrace. Again, in those questions of faith and discipline, which the ill-exercised ingenuity of men is for ever raising and pressing upon the attention of Christendom, it is just as obvious that there must be some tribunal to pronounce an authoritative judgment. Otherwise, each nation is torn into sects; and amid the throng of sects where is unity? 'To maintain that a crowd of independent churches form a church, one and universal, is to maintain in other terms that all the political governments of Europe only form a single government, one and universal.' There could no more be a kingdom of France without a king, nor an empire of Russia without an emperor, than there could be one universal church without an acknowledged head. That this head must be the successor of St. Peter, is declared alike by the voice of tradition, the explicit testimony of the early writers, the repeated utterances of later theologians of all schools, and that general sentiment which presses itself upon every conscientious reader of religious history.

The argument that the voice of the Church is to be sought in general councils is absurd. To maintain that a council has any other function than to assure and certify the Pope, when he chooses to strengthen his judgment or to satisfy his doubts, is to destroy

visible unity. Suppose there to be an equal division of votes, as happened in the famous case of Fénelon, and might as well happen in a general council, the doubt would after all be solved by the final vote of the Pope. And 'what is doubtful for twenty selected men is doubtful for the whole human race. Those who suppose that by multiplying the deliberating voices doubt is lessened, must have very little knowledge of men, and can never have sat in a deliberative body.' Again, supposing there to present itself one of those questions of divine metaphysics that it is absolutely necessary to refer to the decision of the supreme tribunal. Then our interest is not that it should be decided in such or such a manner, but that it should be decided without delay and without appeal. Besides, the world is now grown too vast for general councils, which seem to be made only for the youth of Christianity. In fine, why pursue futile or mischievous discussions as to whether the Pope is above the Council or the Council above the Pope? In ordinary questions in which a king is conscious of sufficient light, he decides them himself, while the others in which he is not conscious of this light, he transfers to the States-General presided over by himself, but he is equally sovereign in either case. So with the Pope and the Council. Let us be content to know, in the words of Thomassin,<sup>1</sup> that 'the Pope

<sup>1</sup> Thomassin, the eminent French theologian, flourished from the middle to the end of the seventeenth century. The aim of his writings generally was to reconcile conflicting opinions on

in the midst of his Council is above himself, and that the Council decapitated of its chief is below him.'

The point so constantly dwelt upon by Bossuet, the obligation of the canons upon the Pope, was of very little worth in De Maistre's judgment, and he almost speaks with disrespect of the great Catholic defender for being so prolix and pertinacious in elaborating it. Here again he finds in Thomassin the most concise statement of what he held to be the true view, just as he does in the controversy as to the relative superiority of the Pope or the Council. 'There is only an apparent contradiction,' says Thomassin, 'between saying that the Pope is above the canons, and that he is bound by them; that he is master of the canons, or that he is not. Those who place him above the canons or make him their master, only pretend that he *has a dispensing power over them*; while those who deny that he is above the canons or is their master, mean no more than that he *can only exercise a dispensing power for the convenience and in the necessities of the Church*.' This is an excel-

discipline or doctrine by exhibiting a true sense in all. In this spirit he wrote on the Pope and the Councils, and on the never-ending question of Grace. Among other things, he insisted that all languages could be traced to the Hebrew. He wrote a defence of the edict in which Lewis XIV. revoked the Edict of Nantes, contending that it was less harsh than some of the decrees of Theodosius and Justinian, which the holiest fathers of the Church had not scrupled to approve—an argument which would now be thought somewhat too dangerous for common use, as cutting both ways. Gibbon made use of his *Discipline de l'Eglise* in the twentieth chapter, and elsewhere.

lent illustration of the thoroughly political temper in which De Maistre treats the whole subject. He looks at the power of the Pope over the canons much as a modern English statesman looks at the question of the coronation oath, and the extent to which it binds the monarch to the maintenance of the laws existing at the time of its imposition. In the same spirit he banishes from all account the crowd of nonsensical objections to Papal supremacy, drawn from imaginary possibilities. Suppose a Pope, for example, were to abolish all the canons at a single stroke ; suppose him to become an unbeliever ; suppose him to go mad ; and so forth. 'Why,' De Maistre says, 'there is not in the whole world a single power in a condition to bear all possible and arbitrary hypotheses of this sort ; and if you judge them by what they can do, without speaking of what they have done, they will have to be abolished every one.'<sup>1</sup> This, it may be worth noticing, is one of the many passages in De Maistre's writings which, both in the solidity of their argument and the direct force of their expression, recall his great predecessor in the anti-revolutionary cause, the ever-illustrious Burke.

The vigour with which De Maistre sums up all these pleas for supremacy is very remarkable ; and to the crowd of enemies and indifferents, and especially to the statesmen who are among them, he appeals with admirable energy. 'What do you want, then ? Do you mean that the nations should live without

<sup>1</sup> *Du Pape*, bk. i. c. xviii. p. 122.

any religion, and do you not begin to perceive that a religion there must be? And does not Christianity, not only by its intrinsic worth but because it is in possession, strike you as preferable to every other? Have you been better contented with other attempts in this way? Peradventure the twelve apostles might please you better than the Theophilanthropists and Martinists? Does the Sermon on the Mount seem to you a passable code of morals? And if the entire people were to regulate their conduct on this model, should you be content? I fancy that I hear you reply affirmatively. Well, since the only object now is to maintain this religion for which you thus declare your preference, how could you have, I do not say the stupidity, but the cruelty, to turn it into a democracy, and to place this precious deposit in the hands of the rabble?

‘You attach too much importance to the dogmatic part of this religion. By what strange contradiction would you desire to agitate the universe for some academic quibble, for miserable wranglings about mere words (these are your own terms)? Is it so then that men are led? Will you call the Bishop of Quebec and the Bishop of Luçon to interpret a line of the Catechism? That believers should quarrel about infallibility is what I know, for I see it; but that statesmen should quarrel in the same way about this great privilege, is what I shall never be able to conceive. . . . That all the bishops in the world should be convoked to determine a divine truth necessary to



salvation—nothing more natural, if such a method is indispensable ; for no effort, no trouble, ought to be spared for so exalted an aim. But if the only point is the establishment of one opinion in the place of another, then the travelling expenses of even one single Infallible are sheer waste. If you want to spare the two most valuable things on earth, time and money, make all haste to write to Rome, in order to procure thence a lawful decision which shall declare the unlawful doubt. Nothing more is needed ; policy asks no more.’<sup>1</sup>

Definitely, then, the influence of the Popes restored to their ancient supremacy would be exercised in the renewal and consolidation of social order resting on the Christian faith, somewhat after this manner. The anarchic dogma of the sovereignty of peoples, having failed to do anything beyond showing that the greatest evils resulting from obedience do not equal the thousandth part of those which result from rebellion, would be superseded by the practice of appeals to the authority of the Holy Sec. Do not suppose that the Revolution is at an end, or that the column is replaced because it is raised up from the ground. A man must be blind not to see that all the sovereignties in Europe are growing weak ; on all sides confidence and affection are deserting them ; sects and the spirit of individualism are multiplying themselves in an appalling manner. There are only two alternatives : you must either purify the will

<sup>1</sup> Bk. i. c. xvii. p. 117.

of men, or else you must enchain it ; the monarch who will not do the first, must enslave his subjects or perish ; servitude or spiritual unity is the only choice open to nations. On the one hand is the gross and unrestrained tyranny of what in modern phrase is styled Imperialism, and on the other a wise and benevolent modification of temporal sovereignty in the interests of all by an established and accepted spiritual power. No middle path lies before the people of Europe. Temporal absolutism we must have. The only question is whether or no it shall be modified by the wise, disinterested, and moderating counsels of the Church, as given by her consecrated chief.

There can be very little doubt that the effective way in which De Maistre propounded and vindicated this theory made a deep impress on the mind of Comte. Very early in his career this eminent man had declared : ' De Maistre has for me the peculiar property of helping me to estimate the philosophic capacity of people, by the repute in which they hold him.' Among his other reasons at that time for thinking well of M. Guizot was that, notwithstanding his transcendent Protestantism, he complied with the test of appreciating De Maistre.<sup>1</sup> Comte's rapidly assimilative intelligence perceived that here at last there was a definite, consistent, and intelligible scheme for the reorganisation of European society, with him the great end of philosophic endeavour. Its

<sup>1</sup> Littré, *Auguste Comte et la Phil. Posit.* p. 152.

principle of the division of the spiritual and temporal powers, and of the relation that ought to subsist between the two, was the base of Comte's own scheme.

In general form the plans of social reconstruction are identical ; in substance, it need scarcely be said, the differences are fundamental. The temporal power, according to Comte's design, is to reside with industrial chiefs, and the spiritual power to rest upon a doctrine scientifically established. De Maistre, on the other hand, believed that the old authority of kings and Christian pontiffs was divine, and any attempt to supersede it in either case would have seemed to him as desperate as it seemed impious. In his strange speculation on *Le Principe Générateur des Constitutions Politiques*, he contends that all laws in the true sense of the word (which by the way happens to be decidedly an arbitrary and exclusive sense) are of supernatural origin, and that the only persons whom we have any right to call legislators, are those half-divine men who appear mysteriously in the early history of nations, and counterparts to whom we never meet in later days. Elsewhere he maintains to the same effect, that royal families in the true sense of the word 'are growths of nature, and differ from others, as a tree differs from a shrub.'

People suppose a family to be royal because it reigns ; on the contrary, it reigns because it is royal, because it has more life, *plus d'esprit royal*—surely as mysterious and occult a force as the *virtus dormitiva* of

opium. The common life of man is about thirty years; the average duration of the reigns of European sovereigns, being Christian, is at the very lowest calculation twenty. How is it possible that 'lives should be only thirty years, and reigns from twenty-two to twenty-five, if princes had not more common life than other men?' Mark again, the influence of religion in the duration of sovereignties. All the Christian reigns are longer than all the non-Christian reigns, ancient and modern, and Catholic reigns have been longer than Protestant reigns. The reigns in England, which averaged more than twenty-three years before the Reformation, have only been seventeen years since that, and those of Sweden, which were twenty-two, have fallen to the same figure of seventeen. Denmark, however, for some unknown cause does not appear to have undergone this law of abbreviation; so, says De Maistre with rather unwonted restraint, let us abstain from generalising. As a matter of fact, however, the generalisation was complete in his own mind, and there was nothing inconsistent with his view of the government of the universe in the fact that a Catholic prince should live longer than a Protestant; indeed such a fact was the natural condition of his view being true. Many differences among the people who hold to the theological interpretation of the circumstances of life arise from the different degrees of activity which they variously attribute to the intervention of God, from those who explain the fall of a sparrow to the ground

by a special and direct energy of the divine will, up to those at the opposite end of the scale, who think that direct participation ended when the universe was once fairly launched. De Maistre was of those who see the divine hand on every side and at all times. If, then, Protestantism was a pernicious rebellion against the faith which God had provided for the comfort and salvation of men, why should not God be likely to visit princes, as offenders with the least excuse for their backslidings, with the curse of shortness of days?

In a trenchant passage De Maistre has expounded the Protestant confession of faith, and shown what astounding gaps it leaves as an interpretation of the dealings of God with man. 'By virtue of a terrible anathema,' he supposes the Protestant to say, 'inexplicable no doubt, but much less inexplicable than incontestable, the human race lost all its rights. Plunged in mortal darkness, it was ignorant of all, since it was ignorant of God; and, being ignorant of him, it could not pray to him, so that it was spiritually dead without being able to ask for life. Arrived by rapid degradation at the last stage of debasement, it outraged nature by its manners, its laws, even by its religions. It consecrated all vices, it wallowed in filth, and its depravation was such that the history of those times forms a dangerous picture, which it is not good for all men so much as to look upon. God, however, *having dissembled for forty centuries*, bethought him of his creation. At the appointed moment

announced from all time, he did not despise a virgin's womb; he clothed himself in our unhappy nature, and appeared on the earth; we saw him, we touched him, he spoke to us; he lived, he taught, he suffered, he died for us. He arose from his tomb according to his promise; he appeared again among us, solemnly to assure to his Church a succour that would last as long as the world.

But, alas, this effort of almighty benevolence was a long way from securing all the success that had been foretold. For lack of knowledge, or of strength, or by distraction maybe, God missed his aim, and could not keep his word. Less sage than a chemist who should undertake to shut up ether in canvas or paper, he only confided to men the truth that he had brought upon the earth; it escaped, then, as one might have foreseen, by all human pores; soon, this holy religion revealed to man by the Man-God, became no more than an infamous idolatry, which would remain to this very moment if Christianity after sixteen centuries had not been suddenly brought back to its original purity by a couple of sorry creatures.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps it would be easier than he supposed to present his own system in an equally irrational aspect. If you measure the proceedings of omnipotence by the uses to which a wise and benevolent man would put such superhuman power, if we can imagine a man of this kind endowed with it, De Maistre's theory of

<sup>1</sup> *Du Pape*, Conclusion, p. 380.

the extent to which a supreme being interferes in human things, is after all only a degree less ridiculous and illogical, less inadequate and abundantly assailable, than that Protestantism which he so heartily despised. Would it be difficult, after borrowing the account, which we have just read, of the tremendous efforts made by a benign creator to shed moral and spiritual light upon the world, to perplex the Catholic as bitterly as the Protestant, by confronting him both with the comparatively scanty results of those efforts, and with the too visible tendencies of all the foremost agencies in modern civilisation to leave them out of account as forces practically spent?

De Maistre has been surpassed by no thinker that we know of as a defender of the old order. If anybody could rationalise the idea of supernatural intervention in human affairs, the idea of a Papal supremacy, the idea of a spiritual unity, De Maistre's acuteness and intellectual vigour, and, above all, his keen sense of the urgent social need of such a thing being done, would assuredly have enabled him to do it. In 1817, when he wrote the work in which this task is attempted, the hopelessness of such an achievement was less obvious than it is now. The Bourbons had been restored. The Revolution lay in a deep slumber that many persons excusably took for the quiescence of extinction. Legitimacy and the spiritual system that was its ally in the face of the Revolution, though mostly its rival or foe when they were left

alone together, seemed to be restored to the fulness of their power. Fifty years have elapsed since then, and each year has seen a progressive decay in the principles which then were triumphant. It was not, therefore, without reason that De Maistre warned people against believing '*que la colonne est remplacée, parcequ'elle est relevée.*' The solution which he so elaborately recommended to Europe has shown itself desperate and impossible. Catholicism may long remain a vital creed to millions of men, a deep source of spiritual consolation and refreshment, and a bright lamp in perplexities of conduct and morals; but resting on dogmas which cannot by any amount of compromise be incorporated with the daily increasing mass of knowledge, assuming as the condition of its existence forms of the theological hypothesis which all the preponderating influences of contemporary thought concur directly or indirectly in discrediting, upheld by an organisation which its history for the last five centuries has exposed to the distrust and hatred of men as the sworn enemy of mental freedom and growth, the pretensions of Catholicism to renovate society are among the most pitiable and impotent that ever devout, high-minded, and benevolent persons deluded themselves into maintaining or accepting. Over the modern invader it is as powerless as paganism was over the invaders of old. The barbarians of industrialism, grasping chiefs and mutinous men, give no ear to priest or pontiff, who speak only dead words, who confront modern issues with blind eyes,



and who stretch out a palsied hand to help. Christianity, according to a well-known saying, has been tried and failed; the religion of Christ remains to be tried. One would prefer to qualify the first clause, by admitting how much Christianity has done for Europe even with its old organisation, and to restrict the charge of failure within the limits of the modern time. To-day its failure is too patent. Whether in changed forms and with new supplements the teaching of its founder is destined to be the chief inspirer of that social and human sentiment which seems to be the only spiritual bond capable of uniting men together again in a common and effective faith, is a question which it is unnecessary to discuss here. *'They talk about the first centuries of Christianity,'* said De Maistre, *'I would not be sure that they are over yet.'* Perhaps not; only if the first centuries are not yet over, it is certain that the Christianity of the future will have to be so different from the Christianity of the past, as to demand or deserve another name.

Even if Christianity, itself renewed, could successfully encounter the achievement of renewing society, De Maistre's ideal of a spiritual power controlling the temporal power, and conciliating peoples with their rulers by persuasion and a coercion only moral, appears to have little chance of being realised. The separation of the two powers is sealed, with a completeness that is increasingly visible. The principles on which the process of the emancipation of politics is being so rapidly carried on, demonstrate that the

most marked tendencies of modern civilisation are strongly hostile to a renewal in any imaginable shape, or at any future time, of a connection whether of virtual subordination or nominal equality, which has laid such enormous burdens on the consciences and understandings of men. If the Church has the uppermost hand, except in primitive times, it destroys freedom; if the State is supreme, it destroys spirituality. The free Church in the free State is an idea that every day more fully recommends itself to the public opinion of Europe, and the sovereignty of the Pope, like that of all other spiritual potentates, can only be exercised over those who choose of their own accord to submit to it; a sovereignty of a kind which De Maistre thought not much above anarchy.

To conclude, De Maistre's mind was of the highest type of those who fill the air with the arbitrary assumptions of theology, and the abstractions of the metaphysical stage of thought. At every point you meet the peremptorily declared volition of a divine being, or the ontological property of a natural object. The French Revolution is explained by the will of God; and the kings reign because they have the *esprit royal*. Every truth is absolute, not relative; every explanation is universal, not historic. These differences in method and point of view amply explain his arrival at conclusions that seem so monstrous to men who look upon all knowledge as relative, and insist that the only possible road to true opinion lies away from volitions and abstractions in the positive

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generalisations of experience. There can be no more satisfactory proof of the rapidity with which we are leaving these ancient methods, and the social results which they produced, than the willingness with which every rightly instructed mind now admits how indispensable were the first, and how beneficial the second. Those can best appreciate De Maistre and his school, what excellence lay in their aspirations, what wisdom in their system, who know most clearly why their aspirations were hopeless, and what makes their system an anachronism.

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